

Literature and Natural Philosophy, 1770-1800. The  
relation between scientific systems and literary  
fictions with special reference to Joseph Priestley  
and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Dissertation submitted for the Degree of Ph.D.

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### Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout:

Griggs = Collected Letters of S.T.Coleridge (Vol.I. unless otherwise stated). (ed. E.L.Griggs). Oxford. 1956-.

Patton = The Watchman. The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. 2. (ed. L.Patton). London. 1970.

Patton & Mann = Lectures 1795 On Politics and Religion. The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.1. London. 1971.

Notebooks = The Notebooks of S.T.Coleridge. (ed. K.Coburn). London. 1957-

Corr. = The Correspondence of Charles Lamb. London. 1870.

Other abbreviations should be clear from the context of the chapter to which they apply. For references to secondary material, I cite the author and refer to the full statement of title, place and date of publication in the relevant Bibliography. The Bibliographies are here abbreviated in the following ways:

(B.A); (B.B); (B.C); (B.Di); (B.Dii).

I use the following abbreviated titles in the text:

<u>Remarks on Blackstone</u>	for	<u>Remarks on some paragraphs in the fourth volume of Dr. Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England, relating to the Dissenters.</u> J.Priestley.
<u>Institutes</u>	for	<u>Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion.</u> J.Priestley.
<u>Lectures on Oratory</u>	for	<u>A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism.</u> J.Priestley.
<u>Lectures on History</u>	for	<u>Lectures on History and General Policy.</u> J.Priestley.
<u>Examination</u>	for	<u>An Examination of Dr. Reid's Inquiry.....</u> J.Priestley.
<u>Disquisitions</u>	for	<u>Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit.</u> J.Priestley.
<u>A Free Discussion</u>	for	<u>A Free Discussion of the doctrines of materialism, and philosophical necessity, in a correspondence between Dr. Price, and Dr. Priestley.</u> J.Priestley.
<u>The Political Lectures, The Theological Lectures</u>	for	<u>Lectures 1795 On Politics and Religion.</u> S.T.Coleridge. ed. Patton & Mann. (see above)

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## PREFACE

The sub-title of this study suggests an opposition of 'scientific systems' to 'literary fictions'. Such an elaboration of the title, however, is intended to pose questions rather than to assume answers. The thesis looks at a 'relationship' between 'Literature' and 'Natural Philosophy' and does not seek to locate any opposition. Rather, it is crucial to an understanding of this study to see it as an exploration of levels of integration involved in both the creation of a 'fiction' and in the response to it.

Professor R.W.Hepburn remarks in his Poetry and Religious Belief:

Religious poetry, therefore, is, so to speak, doubly integrated. The Christian symbols effect their own patterning of a life which receives them, and the poet adds his own further shaping as he incorporates them into his closely unified poem. This re-inforcement of one integrating agent by another brings a complexity to any study of the religious poet's work.<sup>1</sup>

This is a shrewd comment, but it is limited on two counts. Firstly, it implies that the process of 'double-integration' only occurs for a religious 'poet' rather than, for instance, a religious 'thinker' or 'believer', and, secondly, it implies that the process only takes place in the formation of a poem by a poet who is also 'religious'. Instead, however, the process of 'double-integration' surely occurs in all intellectual activity, and not least in the activity of the literary historian or critic.

When 'English' established itself as an academic subject at the end of the Nineteenth Century, it stood in relation to 'Classics' rather in the same way as the first English translations of the Bible stood in relation to the Vulgate. The Bible was translated into English so that religious

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1. R.W.Hepburn. "Poetry and Religious Belief." p. 139. (B.Dii).



truth should not be obscured by a language barrier, and, equally, the study of 'Classics' was removed from its pinnacle so that humanitarian truth should not be similarly obscured. However, the rise of 'English' as the most significant 'humanities' pursuit crucially affected the relationship between 'humanities' and Christianity. The literature studied within 'Classics' was predominantly pre-Christian, with the result that it was possible for the study of literature to exist happily alongside an acceptance of Christian dogma. There was no conflict between literary and religious authority. The change to the study of English literature necessarily terminated the segregation of literary from religious values, since English literature was wholly produced within a Christian context. To study English literature was often to study the product of the specific process of 'double-integration' which Hepburn describes. There were no longer two dogmatic authorities with delimited territories, but one. The authority of literature became more attractive because works of literature were humanised or existentialised versions of religious authority. Literature became dogma.

My feeling is that we have now entered into a post-dogmatic period with regard to poetry. Perhaps 'sociology' now stands in relation to 'English', as 'English' once stood in relation to 'Classics'. There is certainly a need for us now to examine precisely the ideological nature of our response to the literature of the past, as well as a need for us to recognize equally precisely the ideological constraints and choices which influenced the creation of that literature. There is a need to 'de-mythologise' past literature and to rationalise the relation which we accept or impose between the past and the present. It is not sufficient to be aware that our present response is the result of the 'double-integration' whereby images in literature fuse with our own ideas. We must now see that our response

is the product, at the very least, of a process of 'treble-integration', and each step in the process needs to be consciously understood. The paradigms or the syntheses enshrined in the works of poets have become our dogmas, and we now have to work out our own individual paradigms in the context of a dogmatic tradition of literature which was tentatively created for us in the 1930's by T.S.Eliot and F.R.Leavis. In the light of this contention, my purpose, therefore, is not to encourage the kind of personal relationship with past literature which, sub-religiously, Professor Knights recommends in 'Idea and Symbol: Some Hints from Coleridge',<sup>2</sup> but instead to illustrate the way in which The Ancient Mariner is a 'double-integration'. I have this purpose for two reasons: firstly, in order to elaborate the constituent 'meanings' which were synthesized in the creation of the poem which has now attained a dogmatic status, and, secondly, in order to try to describe the process of double-integration in the forming of the poem which may now be a model for our reaction to it as dogma. In this manner, the study of English literature may be re-humanised, and may again become existential.

In Part I, I explore the intellectual achievement of Joseph Priestley. Here was a natural philosopher whose supreme motivation was to integrate his inherited theological assumptions with his developing curiosity concerning matters of natural science. The connotation of 'integration' normally suggests a self-regarding motivation. Hepburn's use of the phrase implies that an individual seeks to join established attitudes and sets of images with personally developed opinions for the sake of self-satisfaction. This was not Priestley's motivation. He sought to formulate an integrated 'system' for the moral benefit of others. He believed that it was

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2. L.C.Knights. (B.Dii) p. 166.



important to present an objective intellectual system of the universe which could then be rationally accepted by others. In spite of his hostility to 'corruptions' of Christianity, Priestley actively contributed to a shift away from allegiance to theological dogma. In attempting to communicate systematically the dual communication of God to man in the Word and in Nature, Priestley was involved in a process of 'double-integration' whereby the meaningful symbols of orthodox Christianity were absorbed into a new creative explanation of the universe. We shall see that the desire to present a system of explanation which retained the exhortatory moral message of orthodox Christianity corrupted the integrity of the explanation. Priestley's systematic attempts might have been more successful if they had been wholly personal, but he sacrificed individual integrity for the sake of public effect. Priestley attempted to shift the emotion that was traditionally directed towards orthodox dogma to the dogmatism which was his own formulation. Not only did the new dogmatism fail to explain the universe, however, but it also failed to do any justice to the conviction of a personal relationship between man and the Divine being felt by orthodox Christians.

Coleridge had powerful religious assumptions from childhood, and to forget this would be to misunderstand the development of his philosophy. What is important for this study is to assess the relation between these assumptions and the products of Coleridge's creativity. However, this is to simplify. If this were the main intention of Part II, it might reasonably be objected that the thesis should be entitled "Literature and Theology, 1770-1800." That title is not apt because the detailed study of Coleridge begins with the year 1794 when Coleridge's allegiance to Christian dogma was modified by his allegiance to the dogmas of Priestley's substitute system. In 1794, Coleridge was a materialist, a necessarian,

and an Unitarian. Coleridge was in the process of receiving as dogma the product of Priestley's 'double-integration'. In Part II, I follow the steps by which Coleridge sought to reject Priestleyan systematisation and all systems of thought. The steps do not follow a straight path, and some guide-lines are required.

I have indicated that the motivation for Priestley's systematic effort was moral. Priestley's assumption, therefore, was that 'thought' or 'principles' modify 'behaviour'. The objective form of Priestley's systems was dictated by this psychological conviction. Coleridge disbelieved in an innate 'moral sense' as much as Priestley, but he was inclined to recognise abstractly the significance of feelings more than was Priestley. Coleridge wanted to see a process of integration between a man's rational beliefs and his irrational behaviour, much more than he wanted to see the self-consistency of the beliefs themselves. This caused Coleridge to become sceptical of rational formulations which either did not bear fruit in actions or did so in 'wrong' actions. He was unhappy about Southey's 'republicanism' and he became uneasy about Godwinian theory as a basis for political behaviour. He came to feel that systematic '-isms' might be dangerous because they were human creations and might therefore encourage the enactment, in rationalised disguise, of false human desires, whilst the proper seat of authority for behaviour should be extra-human. However, since Coleridge was unprepared to accept the virtue of the pure self, and was equally unprepared to accept the doctrine of prevenient grace, a proper sense of obligation had to be acquired rather than gratefully received. The same scepticism that was directed against Godwinism came to be directed against Priestley's systematic Unitarianism. For Coleridge, Priestley sought to impose rational characteristics upon a Deity about whom nothing should be said. At the same time as the primacy of the 'self' and the



incomprehensible primacy of the 'Deity' began to coalesce, Coleridge also became trapped in a circular position with regard to the relation between 'thought' and 'action'. Coleridge seemed to acquire a theory concerning the attainment of knowledge of God after he had been forced to assume that the spontaneous dictates of his own being and of the Divine Being were the same. Coleridge became conscious that his theory of the achievement of subordination to the Divine will by means of an inaugurating deed of an a-moral nature was a rationalisation of a directly felt ontological relationship. He became sceptical about the status of his explanation at the same time as he proceeded to elaborate it. In the Political and Theological Lectures of 1795, Coleridge both rationalises himself into a sense of identity with God, and also makes progress in developing a rational theory of the process leading to 'Godlikeness' arising from the relation of 'thought' to 'action'. Coleridge's thinking contains an implicit sense of one-ness with God and also an explicit programme which might be followed by others for the benefit of society. I elaborate these points in the first four chapters of Part II.

In effect, Coleridge's thinking in moral philosophy had caused him to see that religious belief was the result of a delicate relationship between meditation and action, faith and works, necessarily involving emotional experience rather than the purely intellectual commitment to an integrated system envisaged by Priestley. But although Coleridge rejected Priestley's attempt to integrate an orthodox theological system with positivist scientific attitudes, it does not at all follow that Coleridge ceased to examine the relation between orthodox dogma and the 'facts' of science. On the contrary, the multitude of current systems gathered in Coleridge's mind as a series of alternative descriptions of the rational theory that he had formulated. Aspects of various theories coalesced in the making of The

Ancient Mariner. Equally, persons and events were influential. The making of the poem conformed to the theory of delicate inter-play between thought and action that Coleridge proposed for the pursuit of theological knowledge. He had himself reached a theological conviction by an intellectual process, but the possibility of an experiential one-ness with God became the subject of his poem whilst the creation of the poem was itself, for Coleridge, the enactment of the process that he posited for theological awareness. For the remaining chapters of Part II, therefore, I seek to indicate both the development of Coleridge's thought and also the experiential basis of his thinking which continually moved across to inform the nature of the thought itself. Whilst Coleridge was thinking about the implications of the relation between thought and behaviour, in other words, his own balance of thought and action continually provided material to aid his reflection. Coleridge's correspondence and slight friendship with John Thelwall, for instance, stimulated Coleridge in two ways. Firstly, Coleridge took pains to understand Thelwall's philosophy, and it seems likely that he was interested abstractly in Thelwall's secular morality, his laissez-faire naturalism, his hostility to retrospective remorse, his uncertain confidence in the physical communication of sympathy, and his vision of the potential organic unity of man with nature. All these attitudes merged with Coleridge's speculative considerations and contributed to his description of the process which led towards Godlikeness, but, secondly, Coleridge was interested in the relation between Thelwall's thought and his behaviour, and he tended to see his friend symbolically as an energetic activist. Coleridge was thus in a position to use the person of Thelwall as a datum with which he could work in his speculation. The person of Thelwall fitted into the theory of Coleridge which was itself a partial adaptation of Thelwall's philosophy.

Coleridge's relationships with Charles Lamb and Charles Lloyd were similarly complex. There was a continuous oscillation between theory and actuality. The problems and characters of Charles and Mary Lamb merged in Coleridge's speculation. Mary had acted in killing her mother, and Charles suffered from her action. The action of Mary fused with the activism of Thelwall, whilst Charles provided examples of remorse and fortitude which were positive rather than self-indulgently retrospective. Coleridge offered consolation in terms of his developing theory that passivity and suffering were necessary preludes to Godlikeness, but Charles Lamb's behaviour and experience offered vivid exemplification of the theory. Lamb's loneliness and his sense of isolation from human relationships as a result of living in London provided data for a 'type' that was totally opposed to the Thelwall 'type', but Coleridge's belief in transformation of character was such that the two 'types' were fused. Coleridge began to believe that 'Lamb' could not exist unless he had been 'Thelwall', and that for his spiritual well-being 'Thelwall' must become 'Lamb'.

The influence of Charles Lloyd was also significant. It was perhaps through Lloyd's parents that Coleridge became interested in Quaker ideas and in spiritual autobiographies. Coleridge's theory of the necessary interaction between thought and behaviour as a prelude to a relationship with God was stated in more orthodox Christian terms at the end of 1796 and during 1797 than it had been previously. This was mainly due to his reading of Seventeenth century theology at this time. The language of sin, repentance, and redemption was now super-imposed upon the language of crime, remorse, and Godlikeness which earlier characterised Coleridge's theory. But the Quaker influence was strong in Coleridge's emphasis of quiescence and openness to Divine influence. The receptiveness to Divine grace which Coleridge had earlier eschewed now fits neatly into his schema as a

description of man's condition after his primary assertion of will in action. The language of Christian orthodoxy now reinforces certain aspects of Coleridge's own system. Coleridge is not converted to an acceptance of the sufficiency of Christian description. This development in Coleridge's thinking may coincide with his acquaintance with Charles Lloyd only by chance, but Coleridge's knowledge of the personal condition of Lloyd was also grist for his speculative mill. Coleridge saw Lloyd as in the predicament of Mary Lamb and wished to transform him so that he reached the suffering contentment of Charles Lamb. Thelwall was a conscious activist, whilst Coleridge saw Mary Lamb as someone whose action had been willed by providence. The unconsciousness of Lloyd's actions, however, was not a manifestation of the hand of providence but a symptom of his physical illness. It is not clear what was the precise nature of Lloyd's illness, but it is possible that he suffered from epilepsy. Certainly, the case of Lloyd must have given a further dimension to Coleridge's sense of the nature of activity. Coleridge's friendship with Thomas Beddoes whom he consulted about Lloyd's condition and some of whose pamphlets he had reviewed in The Watchman, must have enlarged his medical knowledge and, importantly, also have offered the prospect of conflicting systematic medical theories. Unconscious physical activity might not be the hand of providence, but it might be a determined event in a materialist universe. Medical science might confirm the necessity of Coleridge's system of which the end rather than the origin was God.

I attempt, therefore, to present in Part II a picture of Coleridge as a person manipulating ideas and persons as ideas to give substance to a theory of the progression towards theological knowledge which was as much an ideal projection for the benefit of others as was Priestley's system. Fundamentally, I do not find it useful to see The Ancient Mariner as an

an autobiographical poem. The fate of the mariner as presented in the poem is the product of a subtle inter-play between theory and observation or vicarious experience. Of course, Coleridge himself felt a sense of isolation and suffered ill-health and had many experiences which corresponded with those of his friends, but Coleridge seems to have analysed himself through others. The poem is not autobiographical, but it is self-expressive. In Part III, I describe the poem and suggest its relation to the process of Coleridge's development analysed in Part II. However, the correlation is not easily made, and I suggest that it is best to see the poem as Coleridge's public presentation of his developed theory and also as an indication of the way in which his personal enactment of the theory (remembering that only in enactment was it constituted) found culminating expression for Coleridge in a poem describing the process rather than in the ideal end of the process - Godlikeness. The system which was meant to point the way to God became, almost tangentially, an aesthetic end-in-itself. In looking at the process whereby Christian apologetic ceases to offer an objectively integrated system of the universe whose fictional quality is rigorously denied, and instead begins to offer a meticulously subjective integration which is intended to be of general validity as a guide to theological knowledge but in fact succeeds in being a fiction which is of interest because it is expressive of true feeling. Priestley's system was not integrated with his own self, and, as an account of 'facts' it was unsatisfactory. Coleridge took Priestley's system and systematised the integration of it with his own self and with other influences. The result was highly individual, but, perhaps, less 'fictional' in being a satisfactory account of the 'facts' of his own self.

My account of the relation between the poem and Coleridge's development is necessarily tentative. There is a danger of systematising objectively



the dogma of the poem, just as Priestley systematised Christian dogma in relation to the ideas current in the 1770's and 1780's. Our interpretation of the poem is modified substantially by our intentions, our conception of current moral or social needs, or our conception of the nature of art. Objective ordering can be stagnant, and is often dishonest. Ideally, an account is required of The Ancient Mariner which not only assesses the complexity of its creation, but which is also prepared to indulge in the sort of self-conscious responsiveness which was Coleridge's attitude towards Priestley's systematisation of orthodox Christian dogma. Coleridgean analysis of Coleridge should be personal and not systematic, and how can a scholar who is attracted to Coleridge offer anything other than a Coleridgean analysis? But Coleridge himself exemplifies the point that self-consciousness can be achieved through a precise awareness of the 'other' that is assimilated to the self. To a certain extent this thesis is self-expressive, but I have chosen to indicate the nature of the self-expression not by an account of my integration in responding personally to the thought and poetry of Coleridge, but by offering a brief description in Part IV of the ways in which the interpretations of four critics of Coleridge are related to, or integrated with their evident attitudes towards art.

Inevitably the integrations which I attribute to Coleridge are selected, and further examination would undoubtedly uncover many more. Several practical omissions must be mentioned in this Preface. I have not, for instance, pursued Coleridge's relationship with Wordsworth at all. Similarly, I have paid little attention to Coleridge's relationship with Sara Fricker, and, again, no attention to the poems which preceded The Ancient Mariner, which clearly modified both Coleridge's thinking and his attitude to formal artistic problems. Nevertheless, Coleridge's early radical and materialist

thinking has received slight consideration in the past, and it is important for an assessment of the nature of his activity as a poet that it should be considered alongside the philosophy from which it derived so much.

Perhaps the comparison may enable us to see both Priestley and Coleridge rather differently.

PART I

Joseph Priestley



## INTRODUCTION

Joseph Priestley was brought up within a family circle where theological discussion and controversy were familiar. Born in Yorkshire in 1733, he was cared for by his father's sister after the death of his mother in 1739. His aunt entertained many of the dissenting ministers of the locality. As a result, it was taken for granted that the choice between specific doctrinal positions was important. In his youth it was considered important, for instance, that Priestley should decide whether he was a Calvinist or an Arminian, and when he was sent to the Daventry Dissenting Academy in 1752 he then decided that he could not accept orthodox doctrines of the Trinity and became an Arian. Priestley attended the Daventry Academy until 1755. It was there that he composed the first copy of the Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion, a work which was later published in three volumes between 1772 and 1774. In 1755, Priestley undertook the duty of dissenting minister at Needham Market in Suffolk. There he made a study of atonement which was published in part in 1761 as The Doctrine of Remission and was published again in The Theological Repository which Priestley edited between 1769 and 1771. This first published work implied Arianism, and it was because of his theological views that Priestley was forced to leave Suffolk, and, in 1758, he moved to Nantwich in Cheshire where he ministered to a dissenting congregation and also ran a school. Priestley's interest in education was advanced when he was offered a post as tutor in the recently established Warrington Dissenting Academy.<sup>1</sup> He moved to Warrington in 1761 and remained there until 1767. During this period Priestley's

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1. For an account of the Warrington Academy and other Dissenting educational institutions, see H. McLachlan. English Education under the Test Acts. (B.Di).

concerns, as tutor in 'languages and belles lettres', deviated from the base in theology which had previously been dominant. In 1762, he published A Course of Lectures on the Theory of Language, and Universal Grammar, and, in 1765, An Essay on a course of liberal education for civil and active life.<sup>2</sup> The former work was related to The rudiments of English Grammar, and the latter led to Priestley's fuller development of his educational and political views in An Essay on the First Principles of Government. Publication of other lectures was delayed by decades until Priestley felt that there was a specific reason or demand for publication. A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism was published in 1777 in order to support the case which Priestley was seeking to make in favour of Hartleian associationism throughout the 1770's in particular, and the publication of Lectures on History and General Policy was delayed until 1788. Whilst at Warrington, also, Priestley decided to write an account of the development of experimentation in electricity. Through the assistance of Richard Price, Benjamin Franklin and others, Priestley was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1766, and his promised The History and present state of electricity with original experiments was published in 1767. A year later, Priestley wrote A familiar introduction to the study of electricity. However, the year 1767 marked Priestley's return to theological issues. In September of that year he accepted the invitation of the dissenting congregation at Mill Hill, Leeds, to become their minister. At about this time, Priestley was convinced by his reading of Dr. Lardner's Letter on the Logos<sup>3</sup> that he should become a

2. Priestley was replying to J. Brown. See J. Brown. Thoughts on Civil Liberty, on Licentiousness, and Faction. (B.C). John Brown (1715-1766) - 'author of the Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times. (1757)', see D.N.B. vol. 7. pp. 10-12, is not to be confused with the medical doctor of the same name.

3. See N. Lardner. A Letter writ in the year 1730. (B.C). For a life of Lardner by Kippis, see N. Lardner. Works. (B.C). volume I.

Socinian. Not only did he change his theological position, but he also became involved in the practical problems of the Christian ministry. The titles of a series of pamphlets written in the years of his ministry at Leeds indicate the nature of this involvement: A Free Address to Protestant Dissenters, on the subject of the Lord's Supper (1768); Remarks on some paragraphs in the fourth volume of Dr. Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England, relating to the Dissenters (1769);<sup>4</sup> Considerations on Church-Authority (1769); Considerations on Differences of Opinion among Christians (1769); and A Free Address to Protestant Dissenters, on the subject of Church-Discipline (1770). In these years, Priestley edited the first volume of The Theological Repository (1769-1771), and the publication of the Institutes (1772-1774) was an attempt to provide the instruction in theological matters which Priestley felt was so sorely lacking in churches of all denominations. At the same time, Priestley was friendly to the cause of those Anglicans who were petitioning in the early 1770's against subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles, and had met Theophilus Lindsey<sup>5</sup> in 1769 who was to become the minister of the first Unitarian chapel in Essex Street, London, in April, 1774. But Priestley moved away from this area of polemical engagement, and, in the Summer of 1773 he moved to Calne to become Librarian to Lord Shelburne.<sup>6</sup> He remained there until 1780, and it was in these years that he advanced his own experimental scientific activity and became the vigorous advocate of the doctrines associated with the name of Hartley<sup>7</sup> and

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4. See W. Blackstone. (B.C). For an account of Blackstone's Commentaries, see D.J.Boorstin. (B.Di).
  5. Theophilus Lindsey, (1723-1808), - 'unitarian'. See D.N.B. vol. 33. pp. 317-8.
  6. William Petty, first Marquis of Lansdowne, better known as Lord Shelburne, (1737-1805). See D.N.B. vol. 45. pp. 119-127.
  7. See Hartley's Observations on Man (B.C), and Original Letters (B.C). See also B.Rand (B.Dii), and R.Marsh (B.Dii).

of his own systematic version of Hartleianism, involving a trinity of beliefs - in materialism, necessarianism, and Socinianism. In 1772, Priestley had published The History and present state of discoveries relating to vision, light, and colours, and, also, Directions for Impregnating Water with Fixed Air. The first was a continuation of the technique that Priestley had already developed with reference to electricity, but the second was the prelude to his experimentation with air which continued throughout his stay at Calne and beyond, and which was described in six volumes which were published between 1774 and 1786. In 1774 and 1775, Priestley published An Examination of Dr. Reid's Inquiry into the Human Mind, and Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind ... With essays relating to the subject of it, and this area of enquiry was continued by the delayed publication of A Course of Lectures on Oratory (1777), Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit (1777), The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated (1777), and A Free Discussion of the doctrines of materialism, and philosophical necessity, in a correspondence between Dr. Price, and Dr. Priestley (1778).<sup>9</sup> In spite of the apparent move towards an interest in experimental science and in materialism and theory of Mind to the exclusion of Theology, Priestley's central theological concern was not dulled. The Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit was in emphasis as much an attack on Arianism as on 'immaterialism', and, by demand, Priestley published, in 1779, a sermon entitled The Doctrine of Divine Influence on the Human Mind in which he attempted to reconcile his theology with his materialism by reference to Scriptural authority. A year after this publication, Priestley was again the minister of a dissenting congregation,

8. For the Scottish School, see S.A.Grave (B.Dii).

9. For an account of Price's life, see C.B.Cone (B.Di), and of his moral philosophy, see L. Aqvist (B.Di).

this time that of the New Meeting in Birmingham. He retained this position until the Birmingham riots of 1791 forced him to leave the town, branded as a Jacobin. In April, 1794, Priestley left for America where he stayed until his death in 1804.<sup>10</sup>

Priestley's move to Birmingham in 1780 is a convenient point at which to end close examination. By that time, he had written enough in enough fields of interest for a proper understanding of the complexity of his thought to emerge from the works I have mentioned and no more. Even of the works written before 1780, I give no attention to Priestley's writing on Air or on Language and Grammar.

It is immediately obvious from this short summary of the most important years of Priestley's career that his written achievement was massive and diverse - so massive and so diverse that we are forced to ask ourselves where was the centre of his activity, or what was the prime motivating force of his extensive effort. This question is the way in to my enquiry, but it does not lead directly to the answer that I shall present. It is possible to categorise Priestley's writings as I have done in my summary, but this does not bring us to the core of the problem which Priestley poses. It is not sufficient to say that Priestley wrote about Church-Authority, about Church-Discipline, about Government, about Natural and Revealed Religion, about Electricity, about Optics, about Oratory, about the Mind, or about Matter and Spirit. This emphasis implies too much conceptual detachment. I suggest, instead, that Priestley continually struggled to unify his different interests so that he could present a coherent intellectual

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10. For further details of Priestley's life, see his own Memoir (B.B), and the biographies of Priestley by F.W.Gibbs (B.Di) and A.Holt (B.Di). For elaboration of the social and political context of Priestley's writing, see A.Lincoln (B.Di). For a general survey of 18th century religion, see G.R.Cragg (B.Di). N.L.Torrey (B.Di) provides a useful survey of English Deism, and A.W.Evans (B.Di) gives insight into certain aspects of mid-century theological debate.



system. This was difficult enough, but Priestley's difficulties were increased because he inclined towards the presentation of a system which would be exhortatory rather than explanatory. He tried to integrate his theological and his scientific interests through the coincidence of Natural Religion with Natural Science so that the integrated system itself might become a substitute for Theology in its moral implications, at a time when even his own scientific method was becoming steadily more positivist. The strains involved in pursuing this endeavour are the subject of my enquiry. For this reason, a more rewarding categorisation suggests itself. There were occasions when Priestley clearly addressed himself to practical problems and sought to engage directly with events. The situation which he described on these occasions, I regard as the 'context' of his writing. Priestley felt that rational activity was the only safeguard of human liberty between the extremes of anarchy and tyranny which he took to be the warring factions of his 'context'. For Priestley, therefore, it was of the utmost importance that rational activity should be seen to occur and, hence, that his writings should seem to be rationally systematic in 'form'. The formal emphasis inherent in his attitude towards communication and moral persuasion requires investigation and analysis. He was inclined to think that the form of his presentation signified more than the validity or otherwise of the arguments presented, but, nevertheless, his arguments must be examined. I shall assess the consistency of Priestley's arguments with respect to several central problems, and I shall suggest that Priestley's urges to exhort and explain became irreconcilable. In spite of his own thinking about the status of scientific hypotheses in relation to 'facts' which led him to distrust early scientific system-making before experimentation had been fully extended,<sup>11</sup> Priestley would not let go of his more general

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11. See for instance, History of Electricity. p. 480.

systematic activity. He would not accept that his systems were 'fictions', and, even if he had, he would still have regarded them as morally necessary. Priestley's position rested on largely implicit assumptions about moral action. Coleridge did not share these assumptions, and I shall show that it was for this reason that Coleridge was able to present a 'system' which was openly a literary fiction - a poem, demanding what he was later to call a 'willing suspension of disbelief'. Equally, I shall show that the development of Coleridge's thinking which allowed him to conceive of his poem formally in these terms also directed the attitude which is encouraged towards the tale of the mariner. The explanation and exhortation offered by the mariner within the poem bears as puzzling a relation to the real events of the voyage as implied by the omniscient poet/narrator as does the poem itself to the real world that is known to an omniscient Deity.

## CHAPTER I

Priestley's 'context'

The pamphlets which Priestley wrote in the years following his appointment to the ministry at Mill Hill, Leeds, constitute the focal point for a consideration of the nature of his engagement with his actual 'context'. In An Essay on the First Principles of Government, Priestley had made a distinction between civil and political liberty. He argued:

In these circumstances, if I be asked what I mean by liberty, I should chuse for the sake of greater clearness, to divide it into two kinds, political, and civil; and the importance of having clear ideas on this subject will be my apology for the innovation. Political liberty, I would say, consists in the power, which the members of the state reserve to themselves, of arriving at the public offices, or at least of having votes in the nomination of those who fill them: and I would chuse to call civil liberty that power over their own actions, which the members of the state reserve to themselves, and which their officers must not infringe. Political liberty, therefore, is equivalent to the right of magistracy, being the claim that any member of the state hath to have his private opinion or judgment become that of the public, and thereby control the actions of others; whereas civil liberty, extends no farther than to a man's own conduct, and signifies the right he has to be exempt from the control of the society, or its agents; that is, the power he has of providing for his own advantage and happiness. It is a man's civil liberty, which is originally in its full force, and part of which he sacrifices when he enters into a state of society; and political liberty is that which he may or may not acquire in the compensation he receives for it. For he may either stipulate to have a voice in the publick determinations, or, as far as the public determination doth take place, he may submit to be governed wholly by others.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Essay on First Principles. p. 13.



This was an ideal projection for society, and in his engagement with the 'actual' Priestley was always in danger of advocating a course of action for Dissenters which would be suitable if society were based on the tenets which he adumbrated, or of claiming that Dissenters could not possibly be politically subversive as if the society in which this claim would be defensible were already in existence. Nevertheless, Priestley's distinction gave him a polemical platform. The social facts in the late 1760's were that in practice Dissenters were allowed freedom of belief and worship and were prevented from holding positions of political authority. The 'civil' liberty of Dissenters was dependent on the benevolence of those in political authority. It was dependent on whim, not on free choice. However much the English constitution may have been defended in terms of Locke's principles of toleration, in practice there was no contract whereby the individual sacrificed some political freedom in order to secure civil liberty. Indeed, there were justifiable fears that the attitudes of those in ecclesiastical and political authority were hardening against toleration in favour of a comprehensive alliance of Church and State. It was in this situation that Priestley feigned gratitude to his opponents for re-stating their arguments and hence for keeping the perniciousness of their position constantly in mind as a warning to Dissent. In the Preface to Considerations on Church-Authority, Priestley observed:

Considerable advantage cannot but accrue to the cause of religious, as well as civil liberty, from keeping the important subject continually in view. We are under great obligation, therefore, to all the advocates for church-authority, whenever they are pleased to write in its defence; whether it be in the old, hackneyed, but consistent strain, and pretend to derive their ecclesiastical power jure divine, from Christ and his apostles; or whether they go more awkwardly to work, and (as they have been obliged to do since the

great catastrophe of their affairs in England) adopt a more moderate and humble style, being content to receive their divine authority at second hand from the civil powers; whose divine ordination it, therefore, well behoves them to maintain.<sup>2</sup>

It was against the advocates of State religion - notably William Warburton and his followers,<sup>3</sup> that Priestley presented himself as the champion of the rights of men to hold whatever opinions they wished in so far as they were not prejudicial to the good of the whole society. He argued that matters of religious belief were outside the control of the magistracy and that it was an error to assert religious authority with political sanctions. Priestley was not so much concerned to gain political rights for Dissenters as to ensure that their civil rights were not threatened by their political impotence.

Priestley's first stand in defence of the rights of Dissenters was made in his Remarks on Blackstone. There Priestley categorically states:

But, with such men as Dr. Blackstone and Dr. Warburton, religion must be governed by the maxims of civil policy; and I am sorry to observe, even for the honour of the church of England, that, according to their new principles of church-authority, (which would have been disavowed by the founders of it) the mode of vindication, which her champions have lately chosen, seems to arise, not out of her proper foundation, christianity, but out of those abutments which the policy of men have erected for her support; by means whereof she hath contracted not only an alliance with, but a striking resemblance of the kingdoms of this world. What effects this new measure may produce on the minds of unbelievers, or of her own serious and considerate sons, I pretend not to pronounce: only this I know, that it by no means serves to promote a veneration for her in the minds of thoughtful Dissenters; who, whatever others may do, consider themselves as subjected, in all matters of religion, to an

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2. Considerations on Church-Authority. p. v.

3. For W. Warburton, see A.W. Evans (B.Di).

authority much superior to human; obliged by laws which will support themselves without human aid or alliance, and remain in force when the laws of England, and all the commentaries on them, will have no more than an historical existence; and therefore think themselves bound by the duty they owe to their master and lord, Christ Jesus, to observe carefully both parts of that injunction he delivered to them, and to protest earnestly against the attempts of political men to confound and thereby subvert it: Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's.<sup>4</sup>

In opposing the authority of the state, Priestley here claims that Dissenters owe allegiance to a 'superior' authority. Dissenters are obedient to the commandments of God, not of men. As Priestley himself puts it in

Considerations on Church-Authority:

But let the truly christian-minded reader also consider, the indignation with which our Lord himself treated the Scribes and Pharisees among the Jews, who made the law of God void by their traditions, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men; and think what any person ought to feel, who considers the founders and abettors of all ecclesiastical establishments as, in a great measure, liable to the same charge. For what are the creeds, and confessions of faith, to which they require subscriptions; and what are all their ecclesiastical canons, but the commandments of men?<sup>5</sup>

On occasions it is easy for Priestley to insist confidently that Dissenters are citizens of an external state and subject to rules which will pertain long beyond the extinction of the English constitution, but this kind of argument did not satisfy Priestley for very long. Instead, he adopted two kinds of argument to contend for the political neutrality of religious beliefs.

In the first place, Priestley asserted that, by definition, religious

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4. Remarks on Blackstone. p. 18.

5. Considerations on Church-Authority. p. vi.

belief was a matter of personal concern, and of relevance only to men as individuals rather than as members of society. In Considerations on Church-Authority, Priestley argued:

These, and many other reasons, lead me to consider the business of religion, and every thing fairly connected with it, as intirely a personal concern, and altogether foreign to the nature, object, and use of civil magistracy. As a man, and a member of civil society, I am desirous to receive such assistance as numbers can give to individuals, but by no means that assistance which numbers, as such, cannot give to individuals; and, least of all, such as individuals are better qualified to impart to numbers.<sup>6</sup>

and, later in the same work, with special reference to excommunication:

In short, all that the New Testament authorizes a christian church, or its officers, to do, is to exclude from their society those persons whom they deem unworthy of it. There is no hint of such excluded members lying under any civil disqualification. If they were not to be considered as christians, and proper members of christian societies; they were still men, proper members of civil society, and not liable to civil penalties, unless they had, likewise, offended against the laws of the state.<sup>7</sup>

The emphasis has shifted from the easy insistence upon obedience to the superior authority of God to an assertion of the necessity of freedom of conscience and private judgment in religious matters. The use of the word 'conscience' becomes significant in this line of argument:

For my own part, I can conceive no method whatever, in which the civil magistrate can be invested with ecclesiastical power, or ecclesiastics with civil power, so that a conscientious christian shall consider himself as under any obligation to yield them obedience in their new character. In civil matters he will obey the civil magistrate, and where religion is concerned, he will listen to nothing but the dictates of his own conscience, or the

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6. Ibid. p. 33.

7. Ibid. p. 16.

admonitions of his chosen spiritual guide; and to him no farther than he is satisfied he has a better authority than his own for what he says.<sup>8</sup>

The authority of 'conscience' is again involved when Priestley refuses to accept that the civil disobedience of Christ was an exception which should not be taken as an example:

It is said by some, who think themselves obliged to vindicate the conduct of Christ and his apostles, that, though no general plea to oppose an established religion can be admitted, in excuse of a pretended reformer, yet that a special plea, such as a belief of a divine commission, and the like, will excuse him. But I can see no material difference in these cases. The voice of conscience is, in all cases, as the voice of God to every man.<sup>9</sup>

In these two cases Priestley begs the question concerning the nature of the authority of 'conscience' that he is setting up in opposition to the authority of the state. Priestley's 'conscience', however, is acquired, not innate.<sup>10</sup> It therefore follows that the conscience has no authority. Rather it is the communicator of commandments which it learns from an authority. Priestley's appeal to 'conscience' is rhetorically effective, but, otherwise, empty.

Priestley's second line of argument in defence of the rights of Dissenters was more surprising than the first. It emerges most clearly in Considerations on Differences of Opinion among Christians. In this pamphlet, Priestley attacks the practice of excommunication not on the grounds that historically it had involved the withdrawal of political liberty as well as of the rights of communion and had therefore implied a false coincidence of the jurisdiction of Church and State, but, instead, on the grounds that any excommunication for unorthodoxy in matters of belief

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8. Ibid. p. 31.

9. Ibid. p. 11.

10. For Priestley's belief that 'conscience' was acquired, see Part II. Introduction.



or theological opinion was unjustified since no human could be capable of judging the inward feelings of any other human from his verbal statements, but only from his actions. In other words, Priestley was prepared to defend the absolute freedom of the individual in matters of belief on the grounds that opinions were of no importance in comparison with action, and that faith did not matter in comparison with works. He writes:

Let those who maintain that the mere holding of any opinions (without regard to the motives and state of mind through which men may have been led to form them) will necessarily exclude them from the favour of God, be particularly careful, with respect to the premises from which they draw so alarming a conclusion. Of all the tenets that can be the subject of debate, this has the most dreadful practical consequences. This belief lays such hold of the mind, and is apt to excite such a horror of the reprobated opinions, as, in the frail state of humanity, is with difficulty brought to be consistent with any esteem or love of the persons who hold them; and, from the affinity of our passions, is, in too many minds, capable of degenerating into absolute hatred, rancour, and the diabolical spirit of persecution.<sup>11</sup>

And, again, Priestley later remarks:

In all our disputes about different tenets, and modes of the christian religion, let us be careful not to lose sight of the great end and design of christianity in general, viz. that Christ came to bless mankind, in turning them away from their iniquities; to redeem (or deliver) us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. The chief thing, therefore, that we should attend to, and the only rule for estimating the importance of any opinions, is their efficacy for this moral purpose. Let us, then, not suffer ourselves to be deceived by mere words, and pompous sounds. As to those who follow other rules of estimating the importance of opinions, and who think that mere belief can be of any avail to recommend them to the favour of God; they ought, as I observed before, to have

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11. Considerations on Differences of Opinion. p. 11.

very good reasons for their persuasion. For, if once the above mentioned plain and obvious rule be quitted, it will not be easy to find another that can be applied to any good purpose. After losing this clue, men will be involved in an endless labyrinth.<sup>12</sup>

Thus this second line of defence for Dissenters seems to involve a depreciation of belief, a depreciation, perhaps of that which is being defended. As a response to his 'context', however, Priestley was not solely concerned to save Dissent from the false authority of the State in religious matters. He was forthrightly the defender only of rational Dissent since only rational Dissenters could be proper citizens of his ideal society in which civil and political liberty were rationally divided. Priestley was concerned, therefore, to oppose all manifestations of irrational Dissent. At the end of his discussion of the proper form of church government in A Free Address to Protestant Dissenters, on the subject of Church Discipline, in which he assesses the structure of both the Established Church and the Independent churches, Priestley concludes:

Far better, however, were it for any society, that the power of church discipline be lodged in the hands of the minister, and he be the only object of reverence, than that there should be no such power in any hands at all. The former of these situations may be said to approach to tyranny, or despotism; but the latter tends to anarchy, and dissolution.<sup>13</sup>

Earlier in the same work, Priestley had strongly criticised the Independents for their concentration upon the assessment of belief rather than of behaviour:

As to the second object of their discipline, viz. the state of the heart with respect to God, and a person's actual fitness for heaven, their conduct is not only absurd, but dangerous to the

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12. Ibid. p. 30.

13. A Free Address ... on Church Discipline. p. 108.

interests of real virtue. All that men can be proper judges of, is the outward propriety and regularity of behaviour. This was all that the primitive churches attended to; and whenever men pretend to decide concerning any thing but plain facts, of which every man can judge by the evidence of seeing and hearing, a field is open for the utmost extravagance of fancy, which may be productive of the grossest self-delusion and imposition.<sup>14</sup>

Priestley was afraid of the anarchic implications of such irrational commitment:

What can be more precarious than to judge of a man's fitness for christian communion by certain internal feelings, which are incapable of being described, except by strong metaphors; by a kind of faith that is different from believing, and a new birth, that is something else than a change of affections and conduct, proceeding from rational motives; a new birth, in which a man is entirely passive, and to which nothing he does, or can do, does in the least contribute. What room is not here left for self-delusion with respect to the candidate, and imposition with respect to the judges.<sup>15</sup>

The Independents believed in the possibility of a direct relationship with Divine authority, and the commands which they might consider to have received from the superior power might challenge the authority of the state. In spite of the fact that Priestley was willing to use this orthodox claim against the Established Church, as we have seen, he believed that intuitive beliefs had to be controlled because they offered no guarantee of moral behaviour that would take account of the good of the whole. Moral authority must be exercised because inward feelings and the authority of individual conscience cannot be trusted.

Hence, in order to secure the freedom of Dissent from State control, Priestley was forced to argue in favour of personal religion - religion of

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14. Ibid. p. 357.

15. Ibid. p. 37.



the individual conscience, and to derogate the influence of opinion over behaviour; whilst, in order to discourage irrational Dissent, he was forced to attack any emphasis on individual insight into divine will based on the authority of an innate conscience, and was also forced to argue that the inculcation of the right rational moral principles, which could be nothing other than 'opinions', would modify behaviour. In the one case, matters of belief were insignificant, and, in the other, they were to become the crucial determinants of action. The resolution of Priestley's contradiction is easy to find if we again accept that his confrontation with the actual situation was tenuous. He clearly thought that religious belief would be insignificant when it had become rationalised in such a way that commitment to the will of God was identical with commitment to the good of the whole within society. Priestley thought that the purpose of God in creation and the function of the State were the same - to realize the happiness of the whole, with the result that in an ideal world, divine and secular authority would sanction the same behaviour. 'Opinion' did not matter at all in determining behaviour, because the 'opinion' of an ideal Dissenter would be the same as the 'opinion' of any ideal citizen in an ideal society. Priestley did not truly accept the framework of an antithesis of rival claims between God and State within which he was polemically obliged to debate. His task was dual because he was dealing with an actual duality. He needed to argue the case in political philosophy to ecclesiastical and political authorities that the purpose of government was to maximise the happiness of the whole people, and, at the same time, to argue the theological case to all Dissent that the will of God was the same.

In practical terms, the resolution of Priestley's dilemma was also easy. He could oppose the institutional intervention of the State, arguing for the freedom of religion from physical restraint, at the same time as he could

oppose the emphasis on an intuitive knowledge of the will of God in favour of an insistence upon a rational relationship with the Divine. But this last positive possibility for Priestley is unclearly stated. Priestley was concerned to harness the power of divine authority for secular ends. Most certainly he was convinced that he was following a divine will in pursuing this policy, but it would be misleading to suggest that Priestley wanted to inculcate rational responses to a discrete Divine authority. Much more was it the case that Priestley wanted to stimulate a rational response to his own rationalisation of the relationship between divine and human affairs. Priestley offered for the instruction of others his own systematic integration of theological and secular speculation, presenting as theological apologetic arguments which were designed to negate the possibility of appeal to an autonomous theological sanction. The purpose of Priestley's presentation was, in any case, moral. How far, therefore, should his systematic instruction attempt to persuade to action directly, or how far should it offer an explanation of truth which might indirectly stimulate the correct moral response? The question is, partly, whether Priestley was prepared to offer rational explanations which would appeal to a rational private judgment, or to offer a systematic and dogmatic statement which would hope to elicit obedience. Priestley's choice of communicative method ironically mirrors the choice between Church Establishment and irrational Dissent. This is wrongly to imply, however, that Priestley was either conscious of a choice to be made or that he made it. Priestley's endeavour is a mixture of the use of persuasive devices which function without reference to content where the work is its own authority, and of the presentation of an argument which itself debates the basis of authority for moral behaviour.

## CHAPTER II

Systematic Form and Exhortation

We have seen that Priestley felt that the tendency towards anarchy of irrational Dissent needed correction. The product of Priestley's feeling was the three volume Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion, published between 1772 and 1774. It is clear that he considered that systematic communication was heuristically important:

The great object of a minister's chief attention being thus fixed, viz. upon the younger, and more teachable part of his congregation, it remains to be considered in what manner their instruction may be best provided for. Now it appears to me, that the only effectual provision for this purpose is a course of regular and systematical instruction. Every branch of knowledge is built on certain facts and principles; and in order that these be fully and clearly understood, they must be delivered in a proper order, so that one thing may most naturally introduce another. In other words, no branch of knowledge, religion not excepted, can be taught to advantage but in the way of system. Frightful as this word may sound, it signifies nothing but an orderly and regular set of principles, beginning with the easiest, and ending with the most difficult, which, in this manner, are the most easily demonstrated. No person would ever think of teaching Law or Medicine, or any other branch of science in the manner in which religion is now generally taught; and as no person ever acquired a competent knowledge of Law, Medicine, or any other science by hearing declamatory discourses upon the subject; so neither can we reasonably expect that a just and comprehensive knowledge of religion should ever be communicated in the same loose and incoherent manner.<sup>1</sup>

Priestley had already discussed the nature of persuasion in the lectures on Oratory which he had given at Warrington, and which were to be published in

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1. Institutes. Vol. I. p.xxxi.

1777. It was traditional to regard oratory as an art, but Priestley could not be happy with the idea that attitudes of persons might be unnaturally manipulated by the techniques of presentation which treatises on oratory conventionally described.<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of his lectures Priestley insisted that the art of communication was dependent on prior knowledge:

It may not be amiss, at the entrance upon these Lectures upon Oratory and Criticism, to premise one caution; which is, that we must not expect too much from the art; since this can do little for us in comparison of what must be the fruit of our own previous application to science. The art of oratory can only consist of rules for the proper use of those materials which must be acquired from various study and observation, of which, therefore, unless a person be possessed, no art of oratory can make him an orator.<sup>3</sup>

It was essential to have a corpus of knowledge to communicate. Priestley's commitment to associationism made it inevitable that he should believe that the way in which an individual accumulated knowledge would also be the way in which another individual might progress towards the same knowledge. The process of communication was nothing other than the repetition of one's own thought-process for the benefit of others. Oratory might provide artificial rules of communication, but these were only rationalisations of what would naturally occur without rules. Discussing 'recollection' and 'invention' in the fourth lecture on oratory, Priestley observes:

What is recollection but the introduction of one idea into the mind by means of another with which it was previously associated? Are not ideas associated by means of their connection with, and relation to one another? And is it not very possible that

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2. For a conventional treatise, to which Priestley refers, see J. Ward (B.C).
  3. Lectures on Oratory. p. 2.

particular ideas may be recollected by means of general ideas, which include them?

It is impossible to endeavour to recollect (or, as we generally say, invent) materials for a discourse, without running over in our minds such general heads of discourse as we have found by experience to assist us in that operation. It is even impossible to conceive in what other manner a voluntary effort to invent, or recollect, can be directed. A person may not have recourse to any particular list, or enumeration, of topics; or he may never have heard of the artificial distribution of them by rhetoricians; but if he compose at all, though he may be ignorant of the name, he must be possessed of the thing.<sup>4</sup>

Priestley moved so far away from artificial manipulation that he was able to argue for spontaneity of delivery, since the less rational control that occurred, the more likely it would be that natural thought processes might be conveyed from person to person:

It may, likewise, be of service to add, that it is very possible a writer may cramp his faculties, and injure his productions, by too great a scrupulosity in the first composition. That close attention to a subject which composition requires, unavoidably warms the imagination: then ideas crowd upon us, the mind hastens, as it were, into the midst of things, and is impatient till those strong conceptions be expressed. In such a situation, to reject the first, perhaps loose and incorrect thoughts, is to reject a train of just and valuable thoughts, that would follow by their connexion with them, and to embarrass and impoverish the whole work. Whenever, therefore, we begin to feel the ardour of composition, it is most advisable to indulge it freely, and leave little proprieties to be adjusted at our leisure.

Besides, if we would wish to communicate to our readers those strong sensations that we feel in the ardour of composition, we must endeavour to express them whole of our sentiments and

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4. Ibid. p. 22.



sensations, in the very order and connexion in which they actually presented themselves to us at that time. For, such is the similarity of all human minds, that when the same appearances are presented to another person, his mind will, in general, be equally struck and affected with them, and the composition will appear to him to be natural and animated. Whereas, if, in consequence of an ill-judged scrupulosity and delay, we once lose sight of any part of that train of ideas with which our own minds were so warmed and interested, it may be impossible to recover it: and perhaps no other train of ideas, thought, separately taken, they may appear to be better adapted to the subject, may have the same power to excite those sensations with which we would wish to composition might be read. Whatever these sensations be, they will be the same with those with which the composition was written; it being almost impossible to counterfeit successfully in such a case as this. As, therefore, we wish to affect and interest the minds of our readers, we should endeavour, without losing time in examining every thing with a minute exactness, to express the whole state of our own minds while they are thus affected and interested. Correction will be employed with more advantage afterwards.<sup>5</sup>

This was not only considered to be true of the communication of thoughts from person to person, but also of the communication of 'facts' - the nearer the form of communication mirrored the form of what was being communicated, the more satisfactory was the transmission of information likely to be. This was a psychological truth for Priestley. Hence it was wise for historians to mirror in their narratives the actual chronological sequence of facts:

If the view of the historian be simply to communicate information, and he be desirous to do it in such a manner as to give it the easiest admission into the mind, and leave the most lasting impression upon the memory, his general endeavour must be to give

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5. Ibid. p. 31.



as clear and just an idea as possible of the most striking relations that the ideas he exhibits bear to one another; since it is by means of their mutual relations that ideas introduce one another, and cohere, as it were, in the mind.

In general, the order of nature, or of their real existence, will be found to be, at the same time, both the easiest, and, in every respect, the best manner of reciting them, viz. the order of time for events, and that of place, for the subjects of what is called natural history.<sup>6</sup>

In order to impart some theories, Priestley claimed that it might be most effective to recapture descriptively the process of discovery rather than to attempt to convey the accomplished theory. Priestley called this technique the analytical method, and its opposite - the direct presentation of a completed theory, the synthetic method. In the seventh lecture he explained this terminology:

The greatest difficulty, in point of method, is found in properly arranging the parts of an argument, so as to give them the most weight, and encrease the degree of evidence resulting from the whole, by the aptness of their order and connexion.

Logicians speak of two kinds of method in argumentative discourses, the analytic and the synthetic; and the distribution is complete and accurate. For, in all science, we either proceed from particular observations to more general conclusions, which is analysis; or, beginning with more general and comprehensive propositions, we descend to the particular propositions which are contained in them, which is synthesis.

In the former method we are obliged to proceed in our investigation of truth; for it is only by comparing a number of particular observations which are self-evident, that we perceive any analogy in effects, which leads us to apprehend an uniformity in their cause, in the knowledge of which all science consists. In the latter method it is generally more convenient to explain a system

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6. Ibid. p. 33.

of science to others. For, in general, those truths which were the result of our own inquiry, may be made as intelligible to others as those by which we arrived at the knowledge of them; and it is easier to show how one general principle comprehends the particulars comprized under it, than to trace all those particulars to one that comprehends them all.

On the other hand, the analytic method is properly to communicate truth to others in the very manner in which it was discovered; and first discoveries are generally the result of such a laborious and minute examination, as is, in its own nature, a slow and tedious procedure. Is it not much readier to take the right key at first, and open a number of locks, than begin with examining the locks, and after trying several keys that will open one or two of them only, at last to produce that which will open them all?

Notwithstanding this, in theories not perfectly ascertained, or with regard to sentiments not generally admitted, it may be adviseable to inform others in the method of analysis; because then, beginning with no principles or positions but what are common, and universally allowed, we may lead others insensibly, and without shocking their prejudices, to the right conclusion. It is as if the persons we are instructing did themselves make all the observations, and, after trying every hypothesis, find that none would answer except that which we point out to them. This method is more tedious, but perhaps more sure.<sup>7</sup>

Priestley was aware that most theological presentations tended to be synthetic:

A great variety of modern treatises upon moral subject, in which mankind are far from being agreed, have lately been written in the analytic method, as best suited to the infant state of the science. The science of theology hath been, perhaps, too precipitately handled in the method of synthesis, or systematically; and several ingenious persons, being aware of it, have gone back, and have begun again in the more cautious method of analytical inquiry.<sup>8</sup>

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7. Ibid. p. 42.

8. Ibid. p. 44.

Priestley was himself uncertain of the method of communication to use for theological information, because he was uncertain of the factual basis of the material that he wished to communicate. Was the theological world-view that he believed was a necessary basis for moral behaviour, a fact, a theory, or a fiction?

Priestley was well aware that created fictions - systems which could not be verified, might be morally potent forces. He was sufficiently conscious of the influence of fictions to advise that close attention should be paid to the reading of the young:

These observations relating to the vivid representation of objects, show us the importance of a discreet use of fiction, and works of imagination, for the cultivation of the human heart. The heart is instructed chiefly by its own feelings. It is of consequence, therefore, how they are directed, and it cannot be a matter of indifference what tales and novels are put into the hands of children and youth.<sup>9</sup>

Priestley was inclined to claim that methods of persuasion were used distinctly to influence either the passions or the judgment. At the end of the second Part of the Lectures on Oratory and Criticism, he writes:

I would observe, at the conclusion of this part of the course, that the whole use of topics and of the disposition of them, hitherto explained, hath for its object and end the informing of the judgment, and influencing the practice, and that this is the only direct and proper, at least the ultimate end of oratory. The pleasure that a discourse may give to the imagination, or the emotion it may raise in the passions, are things that are brought about more indirectly, being effected by the manner in which things that tend ultimately to convince and persuade are expressed. The orator may, indeed, intend to please or affect his hearers; but, if he understands himself, he only means to influence their judgments, or resolutions, by the medium of the imagination or the passions.<sup>10</sup>

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9. Ibid. p. 83.

10. Ibid. p. 68.

But Priestley could not avoid having to accept that an emotional response might preponderate over a rational one, with the result that it could not be denied that fiction was often significantly more affective than true history:

The faithful historian, and the writer of romances, having the same access to the springs of the human passions, it is no wonder that the latter generally moves them more forcibly, since he hath the choice of every circumstance that contributes to raise them; whereas the former hath nothing in his power but the disposition of them, and is restricted even in that. I fancy, however, that no person of reading and observation can doubt of the fact, that more tears have been shed, and more intense joy hath been expressed in the perusal of novels, romances, and feigned tragedies, than in reading all the true histories in the world. Who ever, upon any occurrence in real history, ever felt what he must feel in reading Clarissa, George Barnwell, Eloisa, and many other well-contrived fictions. It is to no purpose to say to ourselves, "This is all a fiction, why am I thus affected?" if we read, and form an idea of the scenes there exhibited, we must feel in spite of ourselves. The thought of its being a fiction enables us to make but a feeble and ineffectual effort to repress our feelings, when the ideas which excite them are very strong and vivid.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, the doctrine of association caused Priestley to believe that any strong emotional response was probably evidence for the reality or the truth of the stimulus. Judged affectively, fact and fiction might appear to be indistinguishable:

Vivid ideas and strong emotions, therefore, having been, through life, associated with reality, it is easy to imagine that, upon the perception of the proper feelings, the associated idea of reality will likewise recur, and adhere to it as usual; unless the emotion be combined with such other ideas and circumstances as have had as strong an association with fiction. In this case

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11. Ibid. p. 80.

the absurdity and impossibility of the scene precludes assent; and at the same time, by taking away the associated circumstance, it greatly weakens the original impression. But, while the impressions remain vivid, and no certain marks of fiction appear, the idea of reality will occur; that is, the mind will find itself strongly inclined to believe the scene to be real.<sup>12</sup>

In the Lectures on History and General Policy, Priestley argued that the appeal of fiction to the passions was gradually corrected by judgment based on wider human experience - that the emotional acceptance of fiction as truth was peculiar to the young and was counter-acted by the judgment of the adult. In this work he assesses the merits of fact and fiction rather more favourably for true history than in the Lectures on Oratory and Criticism:

Let a person of taste, and just sentiment, read the history of the life of Cicero written by Middleton, the conquest of Mexico, or the voyage of Commodore Anson, or even such larger works as the history of Herodotus, Thucydaides, Livy, Philip de Commynes, &c. and then judge. If the amazing and interesting scenes of fiction be worked up with more art, be more happily disposed to excite and interest the passions, and be more agreeably diversified with proper episodes, the very thought that it is fiction (the influence of which grows with our years) makes that artful disposition, those embellishments, necessary; whereas the mere thought that we are listening to the voice of truth is able to keep the attention awake through many a dry and ill digested narrative of facts.<sup>13</sup>

The assumption here is not that passionate and judging responses are different in kind, but that the wider experience of 'reality' of the adult causes him to reject certain systems of thought as 'unreal' which might still correspond with the limited experience of the 'real' of a child. The reality of a system, in other words, is pragmatically assessed and,

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12. Ibid. p. 89.

13. Lectures on History. p. 6.



apparently, has no absolute foundation. The appearance of truth and reality can be given by inducing emotions which are connected with those ideas in other contexts. For the purpose of gaining assent, self-consistency of presentation is very important. Priestley writes in the Lectures on Oratory and Criticism:

If, however, the fiction be consistent with itself, and be natural upon any uniform principles, or suppositions, so that it shall require only one single effort of the imagination to conceive the existence of the imaginary beings and powers, and the ideas of inconsistency and contradiction do not frequently occur through the course of the narration, to destroy the illusion; a reader of a lively turn of mind, though of good discernment, may enter into the scene, and receive great pleasure from the performance. But still, in consequence of a thousand reiterated associations, all representations of things not founded on nature and truth will grow less and less interesting as men advance in life. Even those fictions which most nearly resemble truth, have but little power of amusing persons of great age and reflection. And that stories in which are introduced such imaginary beings as the heathen gods, fairies, genies, necromancers, and the like, retain their power of amusing persons of reading and taste so long as they do, may be ascribed to the impressions made by them upon such persons in their very early years; by means of which the scenes in which they are exhibited are rendered much more vivid, and consequently have stronger associations with reality than they would have had, if those persons had not been made acquainted with them, till they had been capable of perceiving their absurdity.<sup>14</sup>

Not only does Priestley recognize the force of a systematically formal presentation, but he also goes as far as to suggest that the convictions alone of the speaker can be sufficient to achieve an assenting response in the listener. The doctrine of association is again responsible for this denigration of the content which is actually communicated from

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14. Lectures on Oratory. p. 90.



person to person:

Every act of persuasion founded upon nature, and really tending to engage belief, must consist of such forms of address as are natural to a person who is himself strongly convinced of the truth and importance of what he contends for; who is conscious that he is perfectly master of his subject, and acquainted with every thing that can be advanced for or against the question in debate; who is possessed even of a redundancy of proof for what he advances; and who is, moreover, perfectly candid and unprejudiced, willing to allow all the weight he can to the pleas of his adversaries.

From the principle of sympathy, which is natural to the human mind, we universally feel ourselves disposed to conform to the feelings, the sentiments, and every thing belonging to the situation of those we converse with, and particularly of all those persons who engage much of our attention. If, therefore, no prejudice intervene, we always feel ourselves more or less disposed to adopt the opinions of those persons with whom we have frequent intercourse. Consequently, we are, in all cases, more disposed to give our assent to any proposition, if we perceive that the person who contends for it is really in earnest, and believes it himself. Indeed, prior to our hearing any arguments, we are naturally inclined to suppose, that a strong conviction and persuasion in other persons could not be produced without a sufficient cause; from being sensible that a like strong persuasion is founded upon sufficient reasons in ourselves. The ideas of strong persuasion and of truth being, on this account, intimately associated together, the one will introduce the other, so that whatever manner of address tends to demonstrate that the advocate for any opinion is really convinced of it himself, tends to propagate that conviction.<sup>15</sup>

It is clear from the above passages taken from Priestley's writing that he was concerned with communication as a process, and also that he was unable to make a pragmatic distinction between fact and fiction. Nevertheless, it was important for him that a 'truth' other than one defined by human

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15. Ibid. p. 108.

association should be isolated. The attempt to discriminate between fact and fiction by reference to their affects may have failed, but it was still a discrimination that Priestley anxiously seemed to want to effect. He confidently distinguished, for instance, between the study of the inherent system of nature and the study of the human attempts to impose a system upon that existing analogous order. Priestley tried to use a distinction between systematic 'facts' and systematic fictional descriptions of fact. This division is made most clear in the Preface to the History of Electricity, where Priestley discusses the different pleasures to be derived from the study of 'civil, natural, and philosophical history'. In natural history we perceive the analogy already inherent in things:

Natural history exhibits a boundless variety of scenes, and yet infinitely analogous to one another. A naturalist has, consequently, all the pleasure which the contemplation of uniformity and variety can give the mind; and this is one of the most copious sources of our intellectual pleasures. ... But he had no direct view of human sentiments and human actions; which, by means of their endless associations, greatly heighten and improve all the pleasures of taste.<sup>16</sup>

In philosophy, however, we are, in addition, able to enjoy the study of the systems devised by men in an attempt to match or mirror the natural order:

Philosophy exhibits the powers of nature, discovered and directed by human art: it has, therefore, in some measure, the boundless variety with the amazing uniformity of the one, and likewise every thing that is pleasing and interesting in the other. And the idea of continual rise and improvement is conspicuous in the whole study, whether we be attentive to the part which nature, or that which men are acting in the great scene.<sup>17</sup>

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16. History of Electricity. p. iii.

17. Ibid. p. iv.

Just as Priestley's account of the 'art' of oratory suggested that it imposes rules on a natural process, so his account of the relation between 'words' and 'things' in general implied that the whole of human systematic endeavour might consist in seeking to offer superfluous explanations of what naturally occurs regardless of human linguistic description.

Priestley reveals this apparent skepticism most clearly in his An Examination of Dr. Reid's Inquiry. In the introductory essay to that work, he writes:

Words are of great use in the business of thinking, but are not necessary to it. In like manner though the knowledge of logic is not without its use, it is by no means necessary for the purpose of reasoning. And as the doctrine of syllogisms was deduced from observations on reasoning, just as other theories are deduced from facts previously known; so the doctrine of propositions and judgment was deduced from observations on the coincidence of ideas, which took place antecedent to any knowledge of that kind.

There is hardly any thing to which we give the name of opinion, or belief, that does not require some degree of abstraction, and knowledge of what passes within the mind. And the common actions of life, which may be analyzed into opinions and reasoning, and which discover what we sagacity in a very high degree, may be performed without any such thing, that is without any explicit knowledge of such mental affections and operations. Let us, for an example of this, take the belief of an external world. This is thought to be universal; and yet it appears to me to be very possible, not only that the lower animals, but even that children may not have reflected so much as that, properly speaking, they can be said to have formed any such opinion.<sup>18</sup>

It is not just that our behaviour is unself-conscious, for the powers of

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18. An Examination of Dr. Reid's Inquiry. p. xlvi.iii.

nature in the external world are seen to be equally independent of our knowledge of them. Having explained the process of human perception a little later in the same essay, Priestley continues:

This kind of knowledge is gained by observation and experiment, as much as the theory of the eye and of light, though we ourselves are the subject of the observations and experiments. And our thinking and acting, in the conduct of life, is as much independent of this branch of knowledge, as the powers of air and light are independent of our knowledge of them.<sup>19</sup>

There would seem to be a disparity between physical processes and the systematic language we use to describe them. In Priestley's remarks on the writings of another philosopher of the Scottish Common-sense School - Dr. Beattie, which form part of the Examination, he is prepared to accept that the disparity does apply to his own doctrine of necessity. He argues:

It is true that, strictly speaking, the doctrine of necessity would oblige a man to depart from the common language in speaking of human actions; but this makes no change with respect to his conduct. The very same is the case with respect to the doctrine of the sun standing still. Philosophers use the language of the vulgar with respect to this subject, and even think with them too, except in their closets, and when they are explicitly attending to it. Copernicus and Newton themselves, I will venture to say, not only talked of the sun rising and setting, but, in their ordinary conceptions, had the very same ideas that a common farmer annexes to those words. So also it is impossible that, with respect to common life, a necessarian should have any other ideas to the words praise and blame (which however are equally foreign to both the schemes of liberty and necessity, philosophically and strictly considered) than other people have, and he will be influenced as much by them. And as to the different views that he will be able

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19. Ibid. p. lvii.

to take of these things in contemplation, they appear to me only to remove virtue from one foundation to place it upon another, much broader and firmer. Our conduct depends not upon what we think our constitution to be, but upon what it really is.<sup>20</sup>

It might appear from Priestley's description of the gulf between fact and human description of fact, that he believed that the nature of things is beyond human perception, and that the knowledge of the nature of things is of little importance for moral persuasion. It would be wrong, however, to think of Priestley as a skeptic. The true situation is very different.

Priestley saw the natural order of things as the systematic presentation of God. Nature and human history, therefore, were already conceptual systems designed by God for the purpose of exhorting men to righteousness and to happiness. God's language was as unreliable as explanation as man's. Human language in communication between persons might seem remote from physical facts, but in the wider, divine perspective, physical facts themselves fulfilled the function of language between God and man. There was no need to be perplexed by the inability of men to understand fully the nature of things, since the 'nature of things' itself was only the systematic device used by God to communicate with man, and, hence, the information transmitted was of no importance in comparison with the sympathy between the communicator and the recipient. What were 'facts' lurking behind the fictions of human language were themselves fictions with no apparent 'factual' antecedent. The conviction and sincere intention of the communicator were sufficient evidences of the truth of the communication. Just as the conviction of a person was taken to stimulate a comparable assent and conviction whatever the content of his proposition, so God's intention to realise human happiness, which, for Priestley, was

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20. Ibid. p. 178.



by definition His intention, enforced imitation whatever might be the content of the manifestation of that intention. Just as Priestley found it impossible to distinguish between the factuality or otherwise of human statements except on pragmatic grounds, with the result that they could not be susceptible to rational examination, so he could not, in these same terms, find any justification for the positivist examination of the language of God - nature and human history.

In discussing the moral government of the universe by God through general laws in the first volume of the Institutes, Priestley wrote:

It may be said, that we might have been differently constituted, so as to have been happy in a world not governed by general laws, and not liable to partial evils. But there is no end of these suppositions, which, for any thing that we can tell, may be, in their own nature, impossible. All that we can do, in these difficult speculations, is to consider the connections and tendencies of things as they now are; and if we see reason to conclude that, ceteris manentibus, nothing could be changed for the better, we may also conclude that the system itself could not be changed for a better; since the same wisdom that has so perfectly adapted the various parts of the same scheme, so as to make it productive of the most happiness, may well be supposed to have made choice of the scheme itself, as calculated to contain the most happiness. Even divine power cannot produce impossibilities; and for any thing that we know, it may be as naturally impossible to execute any scheme free from the inconveniences, that we complain of in this, as that two and two should make more than four.<sup>21</sup>

Priestley describes a God who presented a natural system which was as consistent within itself as was possible, but he also describes a God who made the best possible choice in deciding to reveal himself systematically. As a communicator, Priestley also chose a systematic presentation because

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21. Institutes. Vol. I. p. 30.



he recognised that it would be the most effective mode of persuasion, and he also chose to offer a rational system which was as self-consistent as possible. Priestley was prepared to accept that God might have been under some restraint in choosing his scheme, but his own restraints were different and especial ones. For Priestley saw himself as a communicator of God's prior communication, with the result that he was forced to regard himself as both the de-coder and the re-coder of the Divine message. Priestley's systematisation in the Institutes, therefore, faces two directions, and the very same arguments in the Lectures on Oratory which indicate the force of systematic presentation as exhortation must cause skepticism when the recipient of Divine exhortation offers his understanding of the message either as explanation or as secondary exhortation.

The dominant feature of the Institutes is the systematic integration which it offers of Natural and Revealed Religion. The validity of either the natural science or the Biblical exegesis is secondary. Gradually, however, Priestley came to see that the analysis of natural history and civil history might be of interest without reference to any superior and already existing divinely providential system. The burden shifted from God to man as systematiser. Priestley gradually ceased to gesture towards a divinely ordered system of nature which was empirically unverifiable, but, instead, became involved in positivist analysis which caused him to create cautiously his own systematisation by abstraction from 'facts'. Priestley's systematic effort became less mimetic and more creative. It is this alteration in the relation between the systematic content of his writing and the 'system of nature' that I shall now examine.

## CHAPTER III

Systematic Content and Explanation

The first volume of the Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion, published in 1772, was subtitled: "The Elements of Natural Religion". The first part of the volume is headed: "Of the Being and Attributes of God". The development of the argument under this heading is important but straightforward. Priestley begins by discussion "the existence of God, and those attributes which are deduced from his being considered as uncaused himself, and the cause of every thing else." Here Priestley claims that it is inconceivable that the universe could have existed without a cause. In the course of his argument, for instance, he attacks the Epicurean cosmogony:

It was said, by the Epicureans of old, that all things were formed by the fortuitous concourse of atoms, that, originally, there were particles of all kinds floating at random in infinite space; and that, since certain combinations of particles constitute all bodies, and since, in infinite time, these particles must have been combined in all possible ways, the present system at length arose, without any designing cause. But, still, it may be asked, how could these atoms move without a mover; and what could have arisen from their combinations, but mere heaps of matter, of different forms and sizes. They could, of themselves, have had no power of acting upon one another, as bodies now have, by such properties as magnetism, electricity, gravitation, Etc. unless these powers had been communicated to them by some superior being.<sup>1</sup>

He then proceeds to a discussion of "those attributes of the deity which are deduced from the consideration of his being the original cause of all things," and, from here to a description of "those attributes of the divine

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1. Institutes. Vol. I. p. 10.

being which the consideration of his works leads us to ascribe to him." The transition in argument from a deduction from the divine 'being' to a deduction from the 'consideration of his works' is vitally important, and is briefly effected in the following passage:

That God is immaterial, eternal, and immutable, follows necessarily, as we have seen, from his being uncaused; but if we consider the effects of which he is the cause, or, in other words, the works of which he is the author, we shall be led to ascribe to him other attributes, particularly those of power, wisdom, and goodness; and consequently all the attributes which are necessarily connected with, or flow from them.<sup>2</sup>

A progression has occurred from a predominantly a priori argument to a seemingly empirical one. The argument from the necessity of a first cause that must, in order to avoid an infinite regress, itself be uncaused, has swiftly developed into an argument from the design of the universe.

Priestley writes:

We see the greatest wisdom in the variation of the seasons of the year in the same place, in the provision that is made for watering as well as warming the soil, so as to prepare it for the growth of the various kinds of vegetables that derive their nourishment from it. The wisdom of God appears in adapting the constitutions of vegetables and animals to the climates they were intended to inhabit, in giving all animals the proper means of providing their food, and the necessary powers either of attacking others, or securing themselves by flight, or some other method of evading the pursuit of their enemies.<sup>3</sup>

Equally, Priestley argues from the providential design of human history in which he finds a progression towards happiness:

The designs of such a being as this, who cannot be controlled in the execution of any of his purposes, would be very obvious to us

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2. Ibid. p. 18.

3. Ibid. p. 34.

if we could comprehend his works, or see the issue of them; but this we cannot do with respect to the works of God, which are both incomprehensible by our finite understandings, and also are not yet compleated; for as far as they are subject to our inspection, they are evidently in a progress to something more perfect. Yet from the subordinate parts of this great machine of the universe, which we can in some measure understand, and which are compleated; and also from the manifest tendency of things, we may safely conclude, that the great design of the divine being, in all the works of his hands, was to produce happiness.

That the world is in a state of improvement is very evident in the human species, which is the most distinguished part of it. Knowledge, and a variety of improvements depending upon knowledge (all of which are directly or indirectly subservient to happiness) have been increasing from the time of our earliest acquaintance with history to the present; and in the last century this progress has been amazingly rapid. By means of increasing commerce, the valuable productions of the earth become more equally distributed, and by improvements in agriculture they are continually multiplied to the great advantage of the whole family of mankind.<sup>4</sup>

The emphasis on the tendency towards beneficence in the universe is not empirical. It is based on the assumption of the benevolence of the deity. Nature and history are assessed in a pseudo-empirical manner in order to support a moral contention. Priestley acknowledges that a shift in emphasis has occurred, and, in the following passage, he locates the difference between a 'natural' and a 'moral' argument:

The power and wisdom of God, together with those attributes which are derived from them, and also those which are deduced from his being considered as an uncaused being, may be termed his natural perfections; whereas his benevolence, and those other attributes which are deduced from it, are more properly termed his moral

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4. Ibid. p. 19.

perfections; because they lead to such conduct as determines what we commonly call moral character in men.<sup>5</sup>

Priestley also admits that, finally, the 'moral character' of God cannot be deduced from Nature, but rather from the scriptural revelation of Himself:

Upon the whole, it must be acknowledged, that it is but a very imperfect idea that we can form of the moral perfections of God from the light of nature. It hardly amounts to what may be called an idea of his character. We know nothing of God by the light of nature, but through the medium of his works; and these are such as we cannot fully comprehend; both the efficient and the final causes being, in many cases, unknown to us: whereas the clearer ideas we have of the characters of men are acquired from a reflection upon such parts of their conduct as we can both fully comprehend, and are capable of ourselves; so that we can tell precisely how we should feel and be disposed, if we acted in the same manner. The knowledge, also, of the manner in which men express themselves, upon known occasions, is a great help to us in judging of what they feel, and consequently in investigating their proper character; and this is an advantage of which we are intirely destitute, with respect to God, on the principles of the light of nature. It is from revelation chiefly, if not only, that we get a just idea of what we may call the proper character of the divine being. There we may both hear his declarations, and see various specimens of his conduct, with respect to a variety of persons and occasions; by which means we have the best opportunity of entering, as it were, into his sentiments, perceiving his disposition, learning what are the objects of his approbation or dislike, in short, of gaining a proper and distinct idea of his moral character.<sup>6</sup>

Hence, in the crucial exposition of Natural Religion in volume I of the Institutes, Priestley seems to prepare the way for his exposition of the

5. Ibid. p. 56.

6. Ibid. p. 63.

supplementary significance of Revelation in the second and third volumes. But the phrase "It is from revelation chiefly, if not only ..." indicates a deep uncertainty, and the word 'revelation' itself causes difficulties by its occasionally imprecise use. For the root of Priestley's uncertainty is the problem whether God reveals His 'moral character' in His works as well as in the Scriptures, and, if so, whether that 'revelation' is direct through miraculous intervention, or secondary by means of general laws.

In volume I, Priestley had insisted that Natural Religion deductions can now be hypothetically made, although it is a fact that historically they were not made:

In order to give the most distinct view of the principles of religion, I shall first explain what it is that we learn from nature, and then what farther lights we receive from revelation. But it must be observed, that, in giving a delineation of natural religion, I shall deliver what I suppose might have been known concerning God, our duty, and our future expectations by the light of nature, and not what was actually known of them by any of the human race; for these are very different things. Many things are, in their own nature, attainable, which, in fact, are never attained; so that though we find but little of the knowledge of God, and of his providence, in many nations, which never enjoyed the light of revelation, it does not follow that nature did not contain and teach those lessons, and that men had not the means of learning them, provided they had made the most of the light they had, and of the powers that were given them.<sup>7</sup>

The opening part of volume II is devoted to a demonstration that monotheism was the original religion of man, but that this primitive purity of belief was corrupted by human speculation so that God was forced to intervene to reveal his true self. Priestley tries to prove that revelation was

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7. Ibid. p. 3.



historically necessary because human reason was and is inadequate without aid. At the beginning of this attempt, Priestley writes:

Persons who begin to think upon these subjects when they are arrived to years of maturity, and who find in themselves a full persuasion concerning the great truths of natural religion, concerning the being of God, the unity of his nature, and his moral character and government; as also concerning the rule of human duty, and the doctrine of a future state, do not sufficiently consider how they came by that knowledge; and thinking the whole system to be very rational and natural, they are apt to conclude that it must therefore have been very obvious, and that all the particulars of it could not but have been known to all mankind. But, in fact, there is no man living whose knowledge of these subjects was not derived from instruction, and the information of others; and therefore there is no man living who, from his own sense of things and experience, can be deemed a competent judge of what the powers of his own nature are able to do in this case. For the solution of this important question, we must have recourse to history only, and see what mankind have in fact attained to in a variety of circumstances.<sup>8</sup>

Priestley asserts that unguided reason could not have attained a knowledge of God in the past, and that, equally in the present a priori knowledge is inadequate if it exists at all. Priestley strongly denies here that the capacity of reason was any more restricted in the case of ancient than of modern thinkers. After describing some of the corruptions of theology in ancient times, Priestley comments:

It will be said that such a religion, and such philosophy, were the produce of an early age; and that it may be presumed that, in time, men would have formed juster notions of the attributes and moral government of God, have attained to a steady and practical dependance upon him, and have expressed their devotional sentiments by proper acts of homage. But we shall be obliged to abandon this

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8. Institutes. Volume II. p. 4.

flattering idea, when we consider what has been advanced upon these subjects by philosophers of a more enlightened age, who have abandoned revelation, and have pretended, at least, to be guided, by nature only.

Mr. Hobbes says, that whatever is incorporeal is nothing at all, and he makes religion a business of the state only. Mr. Hume subverts the very foundation of all our reasoning from effects to causes, so that from what we see round us, we cannot with certainty infer an intelligent author.<sup>9</sup>

The misguided reasoning of modern thinkers is given as evidence that God must have interposed historically, but not, as we shall see, as evidence that God must still intervene directly to rectify human errors. Priestley does not want to say that Divine interposition is still necessary because he does want to assume that natural religion deductions can validly be made in the present on the premise of the uniformity of general natural law. Hence, to preserve the possibility of actually making the deductions of the first volume rather than suggesting deductions which 'might have been' made, Priestley must deny that there can now be any miraculous divine intervention. At the same time, so as to preserve the status of Revelation, Priestley has to admit that there were miraculous interventions in the past because the pretended 'might have been' of rational deduction was never actual. Priestley can easily solve this problem by asserting that God is free to change his mind in deciding how he should act in his universe, but it is less easy to maintain a belief in the uniformity of human nature, the unchangeability of man's rational powers.

On several occasions Priestley indicates that it is not incompatible with a belief in the power of God to accept that direct divine interposition in nature has now ceased. In defending miracles in Part II of

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9. Ibid. p. 29.

the second volume, Priestley defends the right of God to behave as he wishes, even though this defence would here imply that in the future God may again choose to intervene:

For any thing that we know, therefore, the best of all schemes may be that in which the divine agency and interposition are never wholly superseded; and though, as was shown before, it be wise, and even necessary to establish general laws, yet occasional deviations from them may contribute more to promote the same great end than a perfect uniformity.<sup>10</sup>

Priestley makes the same point, sacrificing the uniformity of nature, without reference to God when, shortly afterwards, he answers Hume on miracles:

Mr. Hume, indeed, has advanced, that we ought not to listen to any evidence in favour of miracles, or of there ever having been a departure from the laws of nature, because every such evidence is contradicted by our own constant experience, of the absolute uniformity of the laws of nature.

But, with respect to past facts, this is taking for granted the very thing to be proved, because it is asserted by the friends of revelation, that the course of nature has not always proceeded without interruption, but that, for great and good purposes, the divine author of it has not confined himself to it, but has occasionally departed from it. In reality, therefore, all that Mr. Hume has advanced, with respect to this case, is that there have been no miraculous events because there have been none. At least, it is judging from the experience of one age, against the express testimony of former ages, and in a case in which there is no contradiction between them; since both may be equally true. For the course of nature may be perfectly uniform now, and yet may not have been so, in all cases, formerly.<sup>11</sup>

Since Priestley does not want to say that Divine interposition is now

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10. Ibid. p. 69.

11. Ibid. p. 80.

necessary, he argues that the evidence of God which supplements human reason is adequately provided by historical revelation. The essential premise of volume II of the Institutes, subtitled "The Evidences of the Jewish and Christian Revelations", is that to establish the historicity of religious claims is also to establish their timeless validity. As Priestley states categorically in the Preface:

If the bible contains a true history, we can no longer entertain the least doubt, or be under any uncertainty, concerning the existence, or the moral government of God. We are sure that a being of infinite power and wisdom is the author of every thing that we behold, that he constantly inspects, and attends to the interest of all his creatures, nothing that he has made being at any time neglected or overlooked by him; and, more especially, that he is influenced by a most intense affection for all his rational offspring; that he is good and ready to forgive, and to receive into favour all who sincerely repent of the sins they have committed, and endeavour to conform to his will for the future. If christianity be true, we can entertain no doubt with respect to a future life, but are absolutely certain that, though we must all die, we shall all be made alive again, that Christ will come, by the appointment of God his father, to judge the quick and the dead, and to give to every man according to his works.<sup>12</sup>

The implication of this attitude can be most clearly seen in a reference which Priestley later makes to the claims of Christ himself:

If there be any truth in history, all this, and much more than this, was unquestionably fact. Now, what is there in human nature, or in the history of mankind, that can lead us to imagine that the man who could act this part should solemnly assert that he was commissioned by God to do it, without really having such a commission.<sup>13</sup>

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12. Ibid. p. v.

13. Ibid. p. 191.

Priestley is only concerned to establish the conviction of past witnesses, regardless of the content of their testimony. Therefore, it is essential for him to maintain the authenticity of the records of testimony, and, secondly, to argue that human evidence is always reliable - as much in the past as in the present. He insists that this is the case on several occasions, notably when he describes the evidence for the authenticity of Christ's mission that is supplied by the response of the disciples and the leaders of the Early Church:

That a few persons might have had their heads turned, and have acted in an absurd and unaccountable manner, may be supposed; but unless human nature was constituted in a manner quite different from what we see and experience at present (which would be much more extraordinary than any thing that the scheme of revelation requires us to believe) it can never be supposed that so many persons as actually incurred reproach and persecution, even unto death, for the sake of the gospel, at the first promulgation of it, should, all of them, for so long a course of time, have been so infatuated, as to risk and abandon every thing, without a well grounded hope of a sufficient recompense; that is, without a rational conviction concerning the resurrection and power of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

Priestley attacked the way in which Hume dismissed miracles by placing the experience of the present age against the 'express testimony of former ages', and here he argues positively that the rational conviction of a past age properly forms the basis for the imitation of that conviction in the present. Not only does Priestley attack Hume's rejection of the testimony of previous ages, but he accepts that testimony with eagerness. The reason for such eagerness is simple enough, for the acceptance of historically described revelation does not involve the acceptance of

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14. Ibid. p. 117.

present interposition in nature, but, instead, simply the rational acceptance of evidence for historicity. However, this must mean that the authority of Revelation as truly a revelation of the 'moral character' of God is dependent on precisely the same human rationality that functions in natural religion. Priestley readily accepts that the same reasoning process is involved in verifying the evidence for historical revelation and the evidence for a hypothesis about a natural phenomenon. Priestley asks what kind of evidence is proper in order to carry conviction that miracles had occurred:

Now the proper evidence that there has been any such interruption in the usual course of nature, or that any real miracles have been performed, must be the testimony of those who had an opportunity of examining the facts, in the same manner as, by our own observation, and that of others together, we acquire a knowledge of the laws of nature themselves.

In some respects, however, the evidence of revelation borrows aid from other considerations, independent of human testimony, so as to be perfectly similar to the evidence for natural religion. The proper evidence for natural religion arises from present appearances, the doctrines of it being nothing more than the conclusions we draw from them. Could we possibly account for every thing that we see in the world around us without the supposition of an uncaused being, there would have been no foundation for natural religion; but not being able to account for what we see without supposing the existence and agency of a supreme being, we are under a necessity of admitting that there is such a being, and consequently of assenting to every other article of natural religion.

In like manner, a variety of present appearances may be considered as so many standing evidences of several leading articles in revealed religion; because, unless we admit that the divine being has interposed in the government of the world, in such a manner as the histories of the Jewish and christian revelations assert, it is impossible to give a satisfactory account of the known state of the world in past and present times; as,



for instance, that such a system as Judaism should have been established, and such a religion as christianity should have had that spread in the world, which all history shews that it had, in such circumstances as the same history informs us both the professors of that religion, and the world in general, then were.

In fact, the evidence from testimony itself is ultimately the same with this, being reduceable to the method of judging from known and even present appearances. For the reason why we are influenced by it, and act upon it, in any particular case, is that, from our knowledge of human nature, we have found that, so circumstanced, it never has deceived us; so that human nature must be changed before such testimony could be fallacious. For the same reason, all historical evidence is ultimately an appeal to present appearances. For if things in time past had not been as they represent, the information we now receive concerning them, could not have been conveyed to us.<sup>15</sup>

One of Priestley's arguments in support of the contention that revelation occurred historically had been that human reason was so inadequate alone that Judaism and Christianity could not have developed naturally towards their 'present appearances'. Priestley invites the deduction from the course of history that God must have intervened in the natural universe at historical moments. Priestley is asking for a rational deduction that depends on the assumption that historically man has been incapable of making accurate deductions. In practice, Priestley does not sustain consistency in arguing that human nature has been uniform through history. He tacitly works with the assumption that the reason of the present is superior to the reason of the past. The reason that is capable of vindicating revelation by making deductions from human history is as capable of dispensing with revelation altogether and of making the same deductions, if at all, directly from nature. Priestley

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15. Ibid. p. 74.

relies on the human mind to accept in the present a theological explanation of events in human history, whilst he will not allow an identical present explanation of natural phenomena. He is prepared to retain metaphysical assumptions with relation to the phenomena of history, but not with relation to the phenomena of nature. Priestley argues that human nature is unchanged as a means of establishing the validity of past human testimony, but he does not then ask why the present unchanged human nature is now safely able to rely on a revelation that is mediated by reason rather than, as in the past, on revelation itself. The Scriptures are authenticated as historical documents by reason. Priestley emphasizes a historically mediated revelation so as to avoid the implications of present positivism in natural science. But a new systematic effort was needed when his attitude to history also became positivist.

The systematic content of the Institutes involved an attempted integration of an understanding of God's personality derived from the exercise of natural reason and an understanding derived from the Scriptures which contained an account of God's revelation of himself to man in history. We have seen that Priestley went through the motions of arguing that an a priori deduction of God's existence as an uncaused causer was in need of support from 'revelation'. We have seen, however, that in fact Priestley's rational a priorism was only supported by an 'empirical' attitude towards nature and human history which was as fallible or infallible in its rationality as the original a priorism, and totally dependent on it. The 'argument' was circular.

In the Institutes, the relationship between 'cause' and 'effect' was important only in so far as it was the foundation of the a priori deduction of natural religion. It was a logical device which Priestley was willing to use to rationalise his conviction that the universe was controlled by

God. He was prepared to be as skeptical about it as such as about any other rationalisation. In the History of Electricity, Priestley's attitude towards causality is still mentalist as a result of his associationism. He writes at the beginning of Part III of that work:

One of the most intimate of all associations in the human mind is that of cause and effect. They suggest one another with the utmost readiness upon all occasions; so that it is almost impossible to contemplate the one, without having some idea of, or forming some conjecture about the other.<sup>16</sup>

Equally, in the Institutes, Priestley expressed little interest in the debate about the materiality or immateriality of God. Priestley expresses unconcern here, not simply because, as was later to be entirely the case, he considered that it was impossible to say anything about the essence of God, but also, perhaps, because he was able to be indifferent since the divine materiality or immateriality was of no relevance to the logical status of God in his system:

Since matter is a substance incapable of moving itself; since it can only be acted upon, and we cannot connect with it the idea of action, or an original power of acting upon other things, we cannot but conclude that God is an immaterial being, or a spirit. But, we must acknowledge ourselves to be altogether ignorant of the nature or essence of God, and, indeed, of matter too; since, to the properties of length, breadth, and thickness, we cannot be certain but that other properties, of very different natures, such as even perception and intelligence, may be superadded. But should this be possible, we still cannot conceive that a thing which, of itself, is so sluggish and inert, should be the original cause and fountain of life, action, and motion to all other beings. Notwithstanding our ignorance, therefore, concerning the nature of matter, and of the properties which may, or may not be compatible with it, there seems to be sufficient reason to

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16. History of Electricity. p. 441.

conclude that the essence of God cannot be matter, but something very different from it, which we therefore call immaterial, or spiritual.<sup>17</sup>

Only a few years later, Priestley could not have been quite so casual in treating this matter. Nevertheless, there are intimations also in the Institutes that Priestley wanted to see God not just as a logically necessary First Cause who was the instigator of a system which it was his task to de-code, but also as a potent force, an agent in nature. He writes:

As the matter of which the world consists can only be moved and acted upon, and is altogether incapable of moving itself, or of acting; so all the powers of nature, or the tendencies of things to their different motions and operations, can only be the effect of the divine energy, perpetually acting upon them, and causing them to have certain tendencies and effects. A stone, for instance, can no more move, or tend downwards, that is towards the earth, of itself, than it can move or tend upwards, that is from the earth. That it does tend downwards, or towards the earth, must, therefore, be owing to the divine energy, an energy without which the power of gravitation would cease, and the whole frame of the earth be dissolved.

It follows from these principles, that no powers of nature can take place, and that no creature whatever can exist, without the divine agency; so that we can no more continue, than we could begin to exist without the divine will.<sup>18</sup>

It was this emphasis which was gradually to preponderate. Priestley became concerned with active material forces working necessarily in the universe. God is still accepted as the First Cause, but Priestley no longer wants to make deductions of personality which are then supplemented

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17. Institutes. Vol. I. p. 15.

18. Ibid. p. 38.

by 'revelation'. It is possibly false to see this development as a chronological one. It is probable that Priestley held an orthodox 'apologetic' and a positivist attitude towards science and history at the same time. The theologian, the scientist, and the historian are not genuinely reconciled in the Institutes because a Natural Religion is not genuinely under construction. It may well be correct to see the new systematisation which emerged not as a substitute for the systematic effort of the Institutes but as a purer elaboration of the first volume of that work which might equally be integrated with Revealed Religion. With this caution in mind, I shall examine the development of Priestley's natural religion.

In the Preface to the History of Electricity, Priestley praises experimentation because it offers a direct confrontation with nature. Speculating about Sir Isaac Newton's likely reaction to the present state of electrical discovery, Priestley comments:

Could that great man revisit the earth, and view the experiments of the present race of electricians, he would be no less amazed than Roger Bacon, or Sir Francis would have been at his. The electric shock itself, if it be considered attentively, will appear almost as surprising, as any discovery that he made; and the man who could have made that discovery, by any reasoning a priori, would have been reckoned a very great genius: but electrical discoveries have been made so much by accident, that it is more the powers of nature, than of human genius, that excite our wonder with respect to them. But if the simple electric shock would have appeared so extraordinary to Sir Isaac Newton, what would he have said upon seeing the effects of a modern electrical battery, and an apparatus for drawing lightning from the clouds!<sup>19</sup>

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19. History of Electricity. p. xiii.

Priestley is excited by the relation between the laboratory experiment and the actual world, by the powers of nature rather than the system-making mind of man. The same enthusiasm is shown elsewhere in the Preface:

The instruction we are able to get from books is, comparatively, soon exhausted; but philosophical instruments are an endless fund of knowledge. By philosophical instruments, however, I do not here mean the globes, the orrery, and others, which are only the means that ingenious men have hit upon to explain their own conceptions of things to others; and which, therefore, like books, have no uses more extensive than the views of human ingenuity; but such as the air pump, condensing engine, pyrometer, Etc. (with which electrical machines are to be ranked) and which exhibit the operations of nature, that is of the God of nature himself, which are infinitely various. By the help of these machines, we are able to put an endless variety of things into an endless variety of situations, while nature herself is the agent that shows the result.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the work, also, Priestley seems excited that he is no longer discussing human conceptualisations but natural facts. He is excited by the power and cosmic significance of electricity. For instance, he reports Beccaria's<sup>21</sup> ideas in the following manner:

Since a sudden stroke of lightning gives polarity to magnets, he conjectures that a regular and constant circulation of the whole mass of the fluid, from North to South, may be the original cause of magnetism in general. This is a truly great thought; and, if just, will introduce greater simplicity into our conceptions of the laws of nature.....

He thinks that the Aurora Borealis may be this electric matter performing its circulation, in such a state of the atmosphere as renders it visible, or approaching nearer to the earth than usual. Accordingly very vivid appearances of this kind have been observed to occasion a fluctuation in the magnetic needle.<sup>22</sup>

20. Ibid. p. xi.

21. Jean-Baptiste Beccaria. (1716-1781) See *Biographie Universelle*. Vol. 3. pp. 444-5.

22. History of Electricity. p. 351.



The excitement in the Lectures on History and General Policy is similar and has the same foundation. It is significant that in praising the experimental nature of historical study, Priestley echoes the language of the Preface to the History of Electricity:

Works of fiction resemble those machines which we contrive to illustrate the principles of philosophy, such as globes, and orreries, the uses of which extend no farther than the views of human ingenuity; whereas real history resembles the experiments made by the air pump, the condensing engine, or electrical machine, which exhibit the operations of nature, and the God of nature himself, whose works are the noblest subject of contemplation to the human mind, and are the ground work and materials of the most extensive and useful theories.<sup>23</sup>

Priestley constantly asserts that the study of history is the study of cause and effect as an active force in human affairs. In Lecture XXXIII, for instance, Priestley writes:

... if we read history like philosophers, we must principally attend to the connexion of cause and effect, in all the great changes of human affairs. We ought never to be satisfied with barely knowing an event, but endeavour to trace all the circumstances in the situation of things which contributed either to produce, or facilitate; to hasten, or to retard it, and clearly see the manner of their operation; by which we shall be better able to form a judgment of the state of political affairs in future time, and take our measures with greater wisdom, and a more reasonable prospect of success.<sup>24</sup>

As the final sentence above indicates, Priestley was also fascinated by the possibility of experimentation and prediction in affairs of government as much as in natural science. Here Priestley gives a very specific example of the potential advantage to be derived from an experimental attitude towards history:

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23. Lectures on History. p. 5.

24. Ibid. p. 247.

As all other sciences have made very rapid advances in the present age, the science of government bids fair to keep pace with them. Many ingenious men have of late turned their thoughts to this subject, and valuable treatises upon it have been published both in this country and abroad. But what is of much more value, we have now a vast stock of important facts before us, for our contemplation. The old governments of Europe are arrived to a considerable degree of maturity. We may rather say they are growing into decay; so that their several advantages and defects are become sufficiently conspicuous, and the new governments in North America are so many new experiments, of which political philosophers cannot fail to make the greatest use.<sup>25</sup>

Certainly, in both the History of Electricity and in the Lectures on History and General Policy, causality is presented as a manifestation of divine providence, but the enthusiasm for the process itself cannot be denied.

During the 1770's, Priestley's advocacy of a thoroughgoing materialism was resolute. He made his position perfectly clear in the introductory essay to Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind, entitled "A general view of the doctrine of Vibrations.":

I am rather inclined to think that, though the subject is beyond our comprehension at present, man does not consist of two principles, so essentially different from one another as matter and spirit, which are always described as having not one common property, by means of which they can affect or act upon each other; the one occupying space, and the other not only not occupying the least imaginable portion of space, but incapable of bearing relation to it; insomuch that, properly speaking, my mind is no more in my body, than it is in the mood. I rather think that the whole man is of some uniform composition, and that the property of perception, as well as the other powers that are termed mental, is the result (whether necessary or not) of such an organical structure as that of the brain.<sup>26</sup>

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25. Ibid. p. 14.

26. Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind. p. xx.

The defence of materialist necessarianism as not incompatible with Christianity became Priestley's main concern. In the Disquisitions relating to matter and spirit, Priestley's position remains fundamentally the same as that expressed in the first volume of the Institutes, but there is also a change in emphasis. He still insists that nothing certain can be said of the essence of God, but the stress on the unknowableness of God is now greater, and the corollary that a great deal can be said of the effects of the unknown cause is stronger. It seems, perhaps, that scientific and theological enquiry can join hands now that scientific endeavour need not be stifled by unjustifiable theological presuppositions. Priestley's attitude towards nature has become a-moral. Again and again in the Disquisitions he insists that God can only be discerned by an examination of his effects - the forces inherent in nature. In Section IX, for instance, Priestley writes:

We cannot speak of attraction or repulsion, for example, but as powers belonging to, and residing in some thing, substance, or essence, but our ideas do not go beyond these powers; and when we attempt to form any thing of an idea of the substance of matter, exclusive of the impenetrability which it has not, all ideas vanish from the mind, and nothing, absolutely nothing, is left for an object of contemplation. If it be still called a substance, it is, however, as immaterial a one as any person can wish for. In reality, the term immateriality never did, or could suggest any idea whatever. That the term substance and essence are of no use but as modes of expression, is evident from our speaking of the substance or essence of things, as if they themselves were only properties.

If then our ideas concerning matter do not go beyond the powers of which it is possessed, much less can our ideas go beyond powers, properties, or attributes, with respect to the divine Being; and if we confine our definition of God to these, it is

not possible that we can make any mistake, or suffer by our misconceptions.<sup>27</sup>

Equally, in A Free Discussion, Priestley's allegiance to the doctrine of necessity seems to derive from a confidence that he is offering an explanation of the actual. In the Institutes, the proof of necessity was involved with the accuracy of scriptural prophecy - was inseparably linked, in other words, with the idea of divine moral providence. But in this later work, Priestley holds tenaciously to necessarian explanations for the purpose of Christian apologetic so as to sustain the factual validity of the link between the First Cause and all other causes and effects.

Priestley explains:

If I were disposed to retort upon my adversaries, I would say that a man who believes that one effect may exist without a cause (which I maintain to be the case with every person who denies the doctrine of necessity) may believe that any other effect, and consequently that all effects may exist without a cause, and therefore that the whole universe may have none. And what might I not say of the Scotch defenders of the doctrine of instinctive principles of truth; who, disclaiming argument, rest this most sacred article of all religion upon a fallacious instinct; and especially of Dr. Oswald, who even professedly, and at large, endeavours to invalidate the only proper argument for the being of God, viz. from effects to causes, and to prove it to be altogether inconclusive.<sup>28</sup>

There is no doubt that Priestley's God, although still unknowable in essence, is now a God who is active in the physical world, and is recognisable through an examination of his force rather than through an examination of his design of a whole system. In A Free Discussion, Priestley claims:

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27. Disquisitions. p. 105.

28. A Free Discussion. p. xxvi.

Exclude the idea of deity on my hypothesis, and every thing except space, necessarily vanishes with it; so that the Divine Being, and his energy, are absolutely necessary to that of every other being. His power is the very life and soul of every thing that exists; and, strictly speaking, without him, we ARE, as well as, can DO nothing. But exclude the idea of Deity on the common hypothesis, and the idea of solid matter is no more excluded, than that of space. It remains a problem, therefore, whether matter be at all dependent upon God, whether it be in his power either to annihilate, or to create it; a difficulty that has staggered many, and on which the doctrine of the two original independent principles was built.<sup>29</sup>

It would seem that Priestley had come to terms with things as they are rather than with rational descriptions of things without now having to regard things as themselves the language of God. It would seem that Priestley should now be able to direct apologetic attention unashamedly to the creation in which the creator was so visibly potent. But it remained the case that Priestley could not countenance such an unmediated vision. He could not now be content with systematic explanation alone. In the Disquisitions, he remarked that an advantage of the materialist position was that it under-mined theories of pre-existence, and, therefore, discredited Arian doctrine concerning the person of Christ:

Upon the whole, I cannot help thinking it to be a capital advantage of the doctrine of Materialism, that it leaves no shadow of support for the doctrine of pre-existence, or the Arian hypothesis, which are totally repugnant to the genuine principles of the christian religion, so as hardly to be brought within the general outline of it; and that the greatest mischief that christianity has derived from the unnatural mixture of heathen philosophy with the principles of it, has been the injudicious

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29. Ibid. p. 254.

exaltation of our Saviour; which, in fact, has been nothing else than setting up the vain conceits of men in opposition to the wisdom of God.<sup>30</sup>

But it was not just that Priestley needed to integrate materialism, necessarianism, and Socinianism. He was unable to resist the desire to present this system as a vehicle for moral exhortation. Towards the end of the Disquisitions, he commends the value of his integrated system:

In short, it is my firm persuasion, that the three doctrines of materialism, of that which is commonly called Socinianism, and of philosophical necessity, are equally parts of one system, being equally founded on just observations of nature, and fair deductions from the scriptures; and that whoever shall duly consider their connexion, and dependence on one another, will find no sufficient consistency in any general scheme of principles, that does not comprehend them all. At the same time each of these doctrines stands on its own independent foundation, and is capable of such separate demonstration, as subjects of a moral nature require, or admit.

I have advanced what has occurred to me in support of all the three parts of this system, confident that, in due time, the truth will bear down before it every opposing prejudice, how inveterate soever, and gain a firm establishment in the minds of all men.<sup>31</sup>

and, again, towards the end of A Free Discussion:

It is acknowledged that a necessarian, who, as such, believes that, strictly speaking, nothing goes wrong, but that every thing is under the best direction possible, himself, and his conduct, as part of an immense and perfect whole, included, cannot accuse himself of having done wrong, in the ultimate sense of the words. He has, therefore, in this strict sense, nothing to do with repentance, confession, or pardon, which are all adapted to a different, imperfect, and fallacious view of things. But then,

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30. Disquisitions. p. 335.

31. Ibid. p. 356.



if he be really capable of steadily viewing the great system, and his own conduct as a part of it, in this true light, his supreme regard to God, as the great, wise, and benevolent author of all things, his intimate communion with him, and devotedness to him, will necessarily be such, that he can have no will but God's. In the sublime, but accurate language of the apostle John, he will dwell in love, he will dwell in God, and God in him; so that, not committing any sin, he will have nothing to repent of. He will be perfect, as his heavenly father is perfect.

But as no man is capable of this degree of perfection in the present state, because the influences to which we are all exposed will prevent this constant referring of every thing to its primary cause, the speculative necessarian, will, in a general way, refer actions to himself and others; and consequently he will necessarily, let him use what efforts he will, feel the sentiments of shame, remorse, and repentance, which arise mechanically from his referring actions to himself. And, oppressed with a sense of guilt, he will have recourse to that mercy of which he will stand in need. These things must necessarily accompany one another, and there is no reason to be solicitous about their separation.<sup>32</sup>

The isolation of the systematic description from the thing described is evident once again. Necessarianism and materialism are parts of an exhortatory fiction which cannot ultimately be taken seriously as a description of fact since man would not then be able to detach himself from the products of his thinking and adopt a worshipful attitude towards them. Finally, Priestley could not tolerate an ontological monism. Significantly, the exhortation in these two works of the late 1770's is an after-thought. The attempt at human explanation of the phenomena of nature and history was becoming dominant, but Priestley could not trust the

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32. A Free Discussion. p. 301.

possibility of a similarly positivist assessment of moral behaviour sufficiently to prevent himself from wishing to present his systematic explanation as itself a phenomenon to be admired and analysed as a whole.

PART II

Coleridge's Intellectual Development

from June, 1794 until November, 1797

## INTRODUCTION

Joseph Priestley's constant assumption was that principles had to be inculcated in order to fix or change human behaviour. His systematic presentations were necessary because man possessed no intuitive sense of what he should do, nor any innate knowledge of the will of God. Priestley also believed that one could only be confident of the moral stability of a person when his principles were wholly integrated with his behaviour. A person might act properly in spite of false principles because, unconsciously, he was still motivated by the right principles he had imbibed in the past. Such a person, however, would be morally unstable. False principles would soon necessarily condition the person to act immorally. Priestley makes this point clear in the second volume of the Institutes:

Persons who have had a christian education, may continue to act, in a great measure, upon christian principles, after they become nominal unbelievers; especially if a virtuous and decent conduct have become habitual to them, if temptations to act otherwise be not very strong, and if they act without much reflection. But I own that I do not see how I can have the same dependance upon a man's acting a truly virtuous and disinterested part, especially in a case where a considerable risk must be run, with respect to fortune or life, whether he believe a future state or not; especially if he have time to reflect on the hazard that he runs with respect to things of the most importance to him. If, however, an unbeliever should sacrifice his fortune, or his life, in a good cause, which I do not say is impossible, it would give me a very high idea of the force of good habits, and mechanical propensities in him, but a proportionably low opinion of his understanding. It would argue such a weakness of intellect, or such inattention to his known interest, as I should not presume to find in any man. In order to gain my intire confidence, I must see a man's reason, his interest, and his passions, all leading the same way.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Institutes. Vol. II. p. 59.

The emphasis of rational Dissent was firmly on the need for rational principles. These were conceived in a dualist spirit - reason should stand in opposition to feeling. Priestley was aware that 'conscience' took control of behaviour when a person had no time to reflect rationally, but he argued that the principles ordained by 'conscience' should continually be checked against the considered principles which were their source:

In order to govern our conduct by a regard to our true interest, to the good of mankind, or the will of God, it is necessary that we use our reason, that we think and reflect before we act. Another principle, therefore, was necessary, to dictate to us on sudden emergencies, and to prompt us to right action without reasoning or thinking at all. This principle we call conscience, and being the natural substitute of all the ~~three~~ other rules of right conduct, it must have the same title to our regard. As this principle, however, is a thing of a variable nature, it must be corrected from time to time, by recurring to the principles out of which it was formed. Otherwise, as we see exemplified in fact, conscience may come to dictate things most injurious to our own good, or that of others, and even most dishonourable to God. What impurities, what ridiculous penances and mortifications, yea what villainies and cruelties do we not find to have been acted by mankind, under the notion of rendering themselves acceptable to the object of their supreme worship.<sup>2</sup>

Coleridge seems to have begun with an emphasis on integration which was similar to Priestley's, but his problems in moral philosophy were augmented by an acceptance of materialist necessarianism which was initially more rigorous than that of Priestley himself.<sup>3</sup> However much Priestley saw the universe as containing material agents which were the instruments of the Divine Will, he did not, as we have seen, take seriously the strict

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2. Institutes. Vol. I. p. 133.

3. See Part III. (1)

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2. Institutes. Vol. I. p. 133.

3. See Part III. (1)



implications of this position for human moral behaviour. Man himself should have been considered as a material agent among material agents, and Priestley should have regarded rational principles as superfluous 'opinions' which were able to exercise no control over spontaneous instinct. Instinctive human behaviour should have been seen as itself part of God's providential natural plan. Rational descriptions of the obligations imposed by God should have been seen as secondary to the necessary fulfilment of God's will in activity. Priestley was not prepared to take either materialism or necessarianism this far. For practical purposes men stood apart from the materialist and necessarian system of the universe and contemplated it. Throughout the controversy with Richard Price on moral behaviour in A Free Discussion, Priestley insists that the advantage of necessarianism in moral questions is that the individual can predict with absolute certainty the effects which will follow specific actions and can therefore choose how to act confidently by pragmatic criteria. Price wrongly assumed that he was answering a complete necessarianism and therefore argued that it removed the possibility of choice and hence made morality and immorality equally meaningless.

Coleridge wanted to assert the prime sanctity of the 'heart' - of human feelings, but, like Priestley, he was afraid of the licentious implications of a belief in the necessary correctness of any spontaneous action. As much as Priestley, Coleridge wanted to exercise control, but, unlike Priestley, Coleridge distrusted reason and therefore sought a control which would not stand in direct opposition to feelings.

As an undergraduate, Coleridge must have encountered these problems as they were played out before him, as on a stage, in the confrontation between William Frend and the authorities of the University of Cambridge.<sup>4</sup>

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4. For sources for Frend, see (B.C).

Frend was a tutor at Jesus College, and there can be no doubt that Coleridge would have read the pamphlets in which Frend describes his renunciation of orthodox Anglicanism for Unitarianism, and tradition runs that Coleridge was vociferously present at the Senate House trial which condemned Frend's views as subversive.<sup>5</sup> Frend can be fairly described as a disciple of Priestley. Like Priestley, he believed firmly that the Established Church, authoritative dogma, political institutions based on the authority of traditions, and legal codes based on precedent, should all be examined in the light of present reason. At the same time, Frend was convinced that there remained a need for new and more rational dogmas, institutions, and laws.<sup>6</sup> Frend's iconoclasm was directed at practical matters of law, whilst Priestley's was directed more at intellectual matters of theological belief, but both men equally and similarly withdrew from anarchy. Both men attacked the blind obedience of authority, but both were anxious to ensure that a credible alternative authority should be found to restrain passionate behaviour. The views advanced by Isaac Milner, the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, in his summing up advice to the students at the end of the Frend trial, reveal the attitude which was anathema to Priestley, Frend, and the tradition of rational Dissent:

The remaining part of my advice to you is short but important. Beware of entering into religious controversies, at this period of your lives. Whatever may be the profession you are intended for, improve your understandings by the diligent pursuit of academical studies: obey your tutors: frequent the service of

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5. For further details of this incident, and other aspects of Coleridge's undergraduate career, see P. Kaufman. "New Light on Coleridge as Undergraduate." (B.Dii)
  6. For Frend's hostility to precedent, see Considerations on the Oaths. (B.C). p. 5. For Frend's moderate, reformist position, see his speech in An Account of Proceedings in the University of Cambridge. (B.C). p. 91.

god according to the established forms, both in your private colleges, and the university church. At present, take it for granted, that our forefathers had some good reason for steadily adhering to and supporting these venerable institutions. Take it for granted, at present, I repeat it, and those whom I perceive to object to these words will themselves tell you, that it has not been my way to take things for granted: but it is not your time to become parties in controversial matters of religion.<sup>7</sup>

This authoritarian attitude would have been shared by William Paley.<sup>8</sup>

Coleridge's contact with Paley was not personal, but he would certainly have studied Paley's Principles of Moral Philosophy,<sup>9</sup> and in one letter from Cambridge he recommended Paley's Reasons for Contentment to the Evans family.<sup>10</sup> Paley wanted to uphold the status of an authoritative moral sanction and was hostile to the iconoclastic efforts of the dissenting rationalists, but, paradoxically, Paley adopted this position because he distrusted reason altogether. He was explicitly sceptical about the authority of reason of any kind in controlling human behaviour, and he precisely indicated the way in which he considered that rational innate moral sense had become, in the process of transmutation from Shaftesbury to Hutcheson to his own contemporaries and himself, simply a taste or a feeling.<sup>11</sup> Paley considered that men behaved habitually without conscious

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7. An Account of Proceedings in the University of Cambridge. (B.C). p.186.

8. For source for Paley, see (B.C).

9. By 1785 the work was already a text-book and subject for disputation in the University of Cambridge. See Edmund Paley's account of the life and writings of William Paley in Works. (B.C). Vol.I. p.129.

10. See Griggs. 24. p. 48.

11. See The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy. Bk. I. Ch.V. The Moral Sense. in Works. (B.C). Vol.IV. p. 13.

reference to rational laws of either an internal or external kind.<sup>12</sup> The problem of moral control therefore became the problem of inducing habits which would necessarily realise the 'right' ends. The significant value-judgement now had to occur in relation to the selection of the kind of behaviour which could be induced rather than in the continuous regulation of specific actions.<sup>13</sup> Paley was inclined to make this prime value-judgement pragmatically. Objective sanctions had no absolute value, but they functioned in maintaining a harmonious social structure. Hence Paley's conservatism - his insistence that people should remain in the social station into which they were born, and his sense that social aspiration induced by imagination caused restlessness and rootlessness.<sup>14</sup>

It seems probable that Coleridge was attracted by the iconoclastic form of Frennd's thinking, and the attempt of the Unitarians generally to render rational dogma rationally acceptable to the individual. It also seems probable that he was sympathetic with the form of Frennd's desire to find an absolutist substitute. Coleridge diverged from Frennd in accepting Paley's scepticism about reason whilst at the same time rejecting Paley's pragmatism. Coleridge was pursuing an absolute obligation which was neither a 'more rational' authority nor a pragmatic vindication of the status quo. Coleridge emerged from 'the Reading incident' in search of a source of obligation which was pre-rational. Paley had resolved the duality

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12. See *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*. Bk. I. Ch. VII. Virtue. in *Works*. (B.C). Vol. IV. p. 30.

13. See *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*. Bk. I. Ch. VII. Virtue. in *Works*. (B.C). Vol. IV. p. 30.

14. For the first point, see *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*. Bk. II. Ch. IX. Of the duty of parents. *Works*. (B.C). Vol. IV. p. 231. For the second point, see *Reasons for Contentment*. *Works*. (B.C). Vol. III. p. 318.

between reason and emotion in favour of emotions or unconscious habits, but he had merely rendered the original or precursive choice either pragmatic or seemingly arbitrary. The development of Coleridge's thinking was to seek to locate the obligation of the essential physical self. Priestley had expressed distrust of the man whose actions are at odds with his principles predominantly because this situation indicates that rational self-control is dangerously subservient to the influence of non-rational habits. Coleridge is equally concerned that there should be integrity between thought and behaviour, but, for Coleridge, instinctive behaviour has priority. Coleridge is dismayed by a person whose language and deeds are not integrated because he sees that the true nature of the person may be corrupted by the habitual acceptance of false ideas. For Priestley, correct principles constitute the good man and false principles must necessarily destroy virtue, whereas, for Coleridge, the natural goodness of human feelings is reinforced or eroded by good or bad principles respectively.

In mid-April, 1794, Coleridge returned to Cambridge from his barracks in Reading.<sup>15</sup> As punishment for his escapade, he was confined to the precincts of the college for a month, and requested to translate into English the works of Demetrius Phalareus. After his confinement, Coleridge left Cambridge, probably on June 15th, to visit his school friend Robert Allen. He stayed in Oxford until July 5th, after which he went on a walking tour in Wales with Joseph Hucks, a Cambridge friend.<sup>16</sup> During his stay in Oxford, Coleridge met Robert Southey for the first time, and wrote an

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15. For a biographical account of the events leading to the Reading incident, see L. Hanson. (B.Di) pp. 29-35.

16. For Hucks's account of the walking tour, see J. Hucks. (B.C).



excited letter to his new friend from Gloucester on July 6th, just a day after leaving Oxford. In this letter there are many grandiose flourishes, but I want to draw attention only to the way in which he satirically castigates his travelling companion's attitude:

It is wrong, Southey! for a little Girl with a half-famished sickly Baby in her arms to put her head in at the window of an Inn - 'Pray give me a bit of Bread and Meat!' from a Party dining on Lamb, Green Pease, & Sallad - Why?? Because it is impertinent & obtrusive! - I am a Gentleman! - and wherefore should the clamorous Voice of Woe intrude upon mine Ear!?

My companion is a Man of cultivated, tho' not vigorous, understanding - his feelings are all on the side of humanity - yet such are the unfeeling Remarks, which the lingering Remains of Aristocracy occasionally prompt. When the pure System of Pantocracy shall have aspheterized the Bounties of Nature, these things will not be so -!<sup>17</sup>

The feelings of Hucks are distorted by the habitual words he uses to express them. He is really humanitarian but he uses the language of privileged Aristocracy. Coleridge is wanting to expose aristocratic attitudes, but he also cites the incident as an example of the corrupting power of the surface image, as an example of how the habits of thinking that is not integrated with feeling can negate the efficacy of the feeling. He wants pure, natural humanitarian feeling, not a feeling which is modified by the language of class consciousness. In the situation described, poverty was considered to be disruptive of charm, and Coleridge attacks this attitude and wants a direct confrontation with the experience. The girl's poverty is wrong absolutely, not aesthetically. After the Reading incident, Coleridge attacked every kind of hypocrisy or dissimulation, every use of a thumb that would distance the individual sensibility from other

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17. Griggs. 50. p. 83.



sensibilities. It was with Southey that he worked out the implications of this new emphasis.

Coleridge met Southey when his own belief in the primacy of feelings had been momentarily subdued by his sense of shame at 'the Reading incident'. At school, Southey had been demonstrative in his allegiance to Republicanism, and he had been expelled for writing against corporal punishment in a school magazine.<sup>18</sup> This expulsion, as he realised, might well have endangered his career, with the result that he determined to become a 'reed' and no longer an 'oak'.<sup>19</sup> As an 'oak' he had been unafraid of public reactions to his republicanism, but as, under family pressure, he directed his thoughts at Oxford towards a career, he began to hope that, as a 'reed', it might be possible for him to become pliant, to retain ideological commitment to republicanism and at the same time accept a government post.<sup>20</sup> It was Coleridge's intention in his friendship with Southey to show that such a compromise indicated the superficiality of rational ideology, and to prove that 'words' modified attitudes so that 'right' ideological 'words' or 'principles' must be integrated with 'right' attitudes. Equally, it was Southey's intention to show that fixed rational principles were required to maintain the constancy and moral responsibility of the individual, and to imply that 'the Reading incident'

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18. For Southey's youth, see W. Haller (B.Di), and for an emphasis upon his childhood in moulding his personality see G. Grigson's introduction to his A Choice of Southey's Verse. London. 1970.

19. This is Southey's own language. See Southey to Grosvenor Bedford. Oct. 21st, 1792. Curry, K. (ed.) New Letters of Robert Southey. (B.C). Vol. I. p. 10.

20. Southey's friendship with Grosvenor Bedford pushed him in this direction.

indicated that Coleridge lacked rational self-restraint.<sup>21</sup> Southey saw the issue as a conflict between two opposed determinants of human behaviour - reason and emotion, whereas Coleridge did not think in terms of this conventional duality but instead saw the emotions as the instruments of 'right' reason, and gradually came to see 'emotion' as the essential self. Self-knowledge - ontological sensitivity, gradually supplanted rational knowledge - epistemology, as the guiding motivation for moral behaviour. This is the fundamental development which I shall follow in the chapters of this Part, and the description of the transition from epistemology to ontology, or, perhaps, simply from dualism to monism, should provide a substantial background to the dramatic presentation of 'two worlds'<sup>22</sup> in 'The Ancient Mariner'.

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21. For Southey's sense that he had rescued Coleridge from licentiousness, see Southey to Grosvenor Bedford. Sept. 27th, 1794. Curry, K. (ed.) New Letters of Robert Southey. (B.C). Vol. I. p. 80. Coleridge had recently met Grosvenor Bedford. (See Griggs. 55. p. 98.)
22. For 'two worlds', see A. O. Lovejoy. "Coleridge and Kant's Two Worlds." (B.Dii).

## CHAPTER I

Coleridge, Southey, and Pantisocracy

The discussion of the Pantisocracy scheme inevitably focussed attention on the differences in moral theory between Southey and Coleridge.<sup>1</sup> When the perfectibility of man was being analysed, and a community was being planned in which that perfectibility might be realised, it became of paramount importance to assess the relative significance of human reason and feeling for the achievement of the desired end. On October 12th, 1794, Southey wrote to his brother:

This Pantisocratic system has given me new life new hope new energy. All the faculties of my mind are dilated. I am weeding out the few lurking prejudices of habit and looking forward to happiness.<sup>2</sup>

Latent in this enthusiastic comment is the seed of disagreement. For Coleridge, habits are not to be weeded out, but to be redeployed;<sup>3</sup> they are the instruments of transformation,<sup>4</sup> whereas for Southey they are vices which inhibit a rational conversion.

In the months that followed Southey's letter, the discussions between Southey and Coleridge revolve around the nature of the theoretical basis of

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1. For the practical details of the Pantisocracy scheme, see H.M.Ellis (B.Dii); O.F.Emerson (B.Dii); Sister Eugenia (B.Dii); M.W.Kelley (B.Dii); and T.Cooper (B.C). See also the relevant chapter in W.H.Armytage. (B.Di).
  2. Curry, K. (ed.) New Letters of Robert Southey. (B.C). Vol.I. pp.81-2.
  3. This is the Paleyan position. For an early example of the way in which Coleridge had made it his own, see his letter to George Coleridge, postmarked Feb. 9th, 1793, in which he discusses his feelings for his brothers. (Griggs. 26. pp. 53-4).
  4. My use of the word 'transformation' in this context has reverberations which derive from H.R.Niebuhr (B.Di). See particularly Chapter 6. Christ the Transformer of Culture. (pp.190-229). It is significant that, as exempla of the conversionists' position, Niebuhr discusses the Gospel of John and also the theology of F.D.Maurice. Coleridge's position is Johannine, and Coleridge also exercised a deep influence on F.D.Maurice. (See C.R.Sanders (B.Di).)

Pantisocracy, and also around Coleridge's relationship with Sara Fricker. In discussion, these two issues, the one abstract and the other practical, were closely related. The bald facts of the practical situation are that Southey was in love with Edith Fricker and in one letter, from an 'ebullience of scematism' as he later wrote,<sup>5</sup> Coleridge declared his love for the sister, Sara Fricker, presumably, if the above remark is to be believed, because of the convenience of such an arrangement in conjunction with the scheme to emigrate to America.

Coleridge's resolve in this matter was shaken by the fact that in mid-October Coleridge received a letter from Mary Evans which revived the feelings that he had held for her.<sup>6</sup> Complicated issues were at stake for Coleridge which carried the issue far beyond the choice between two women. Coleridge wished to be seen to be a man of honour and a man of strong will, which meant that having declared his love for Sara he was concerned to demonstrate to Southey that he could accept an obligation. Here, Southey's influence was supreme. He believed that he had initially rescued Coleridge from libertinism,<sup>7</sup> and this was an interpretation which Coleridge accepted. To remain constant to Sara in spite of his feelings for Mary Evans was therefore to show that Southey's rescue had not been in vain and that his wayward feelings were now under his own control. Coleridge was wishing to prove that a consciousness of obligation was active within himself, whereas the truth of the situation was that Southey remained the embodiment of that obligation, continually reminding Coleridge of his responsibility either by his presence or by letter, so that Coleridge felt

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5. See Griggs. 93. p. 164; and 73. p. 132.

6. See Griggs. 65. pp. 112-3.

7. See Part II. Introduction.

obliged not by the situation as such, not by his relation with Sara Fricker, but by the person of Southey who was the actual manifestation of that very aspect of personality which he had himself tried to induce in Coleridge. Thus Coleridge was at the same time obliged by his commitment to a friend and by his commitment to a specific conception of his own self, and these two commitments were the external and the internal versions of the same commitment to the belief in the supremacy of rational principle over feeling. However, once in this position which seemed to be a climactic test of Southey's influence, Coleridge did not retreat to his earlier advocacy of pure feeling but instead used the Sara Fricker relationship to test his own synthesis of the view of Southey with his own.

Coleridge wished to demonstrate that the quality of his feeling for Mary Evans could be transferred to Sara Fricker by a process of habitual allegiance to his obligation such that the obligation ceased to have that weight and assumed the form of a natural feeling. The relationship with Sara Fricker was being used, however unconsciously, as a means of attempting to show that the acceptance of an obligation that is alien to feeling in the interests of a general good did not involve the stoical rejection of feeling as Southey would imply, but could, through the habitual cultivation of the obligation, involve finally the integration of feeling and obligation by a process of necessary association. This was the Godwinian assumption,<sup>8</sup> and it was an assumption that Hartley

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8. The relation between 'reason' and 'feeling' in Godwin's 'Political Justice' is problematical. D.H.Monro's (B.Di) interpretation of Godwin is that, correctly understood, Godwin could not conceive of any conflict between the two. (see p.13). Ideally they were coincident, and, further, Godwin does not seem to have accepted any gulf between the ideal and the actual. Southey tended to see Godwin as a Stoic whereas Coleridge seems to have accepted Godwin's ideal whilst realizing that such an ideal would have to be achieved and could not just be assumed. Coleridge's sense of the detachment of Godwin's ideal from the actual leads to his eventual hostility to Godwinism (see Part II. Chapter 4.) See also B.S.Allen. "William Godwin as a Sentimentalist" (B.Dii) and D.Fleisher (B.Di).

rendered theoretically explicable,<sup>9</sup> but the relationship with Sara Fricker provided Coleridge with an opportunity for experimentation.

At no point in his correspondence does Coleridge attempt to disguise the nature of his feelings for Sara Fricker and Mary Evans. On October 21st, 1794, he quotes Mary Evans' letter for Southey's benefit, and then adds:

No name was signed; - it was from Mary Evans. - I received it about three weeks ago. I loved her, Southey! almost to madness. Her Image was never absent from me for three Years - for more than three Years. - My Resolution has not faltered -

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9. Hartleian associationism seemed to provide the clue for the movement from the actual to the ideal, since it seemed to give scientific force to the possibility of progressive amelioration. The problem of the origin of Coleridge's allegiance to Hartley is acute. In December, 1794, he declared himself to be more Hartleian than Hartley (see Griggs. 74. p. 137), but how much before this Coleridge had accepted Hartley's views is uncertain, and, equally, it is unclear from what source Coleridge gained his knowledge of Hartley. Hartley had been a member of Jesus College, Cambridge, from 1722-1730 (see A.Gray & F.Brittain (B.Di).) It seems that Coleridge knew the translation of the German edition of The Observations on Man (see H.N.Fairchild (B.Dii).), but it would also seem unlikely that he would not know Priestley's edition of the same work. I have not embarked upon a comparison of Priestley's selection with the original or with the Pistorius edition, since, unfortunately, Coleridge nowhere makes it clear in what way he read or understood Hartley.

Coleridge claimed to have gone further than Hartley in accepting the 'corporeality of thought', but I want to see this statement solely as evidence of Coleridge's early sympathy for 'materialism' probably of a Priestleyan kind, and I do not want to delve into Coleridge's precise attitude to Hartley. Assignment of influence is obscure, but I think it is accurate to say that Coleridge seems to have been committed to the Hartleian view, firstly, that Locke's association of 'ideas' might be seen as the direct association of physiological sensations, and, secondly, that the divine power in meliorating cosmic conditions in a process beyond human endeavour might in fact be operative in meliorating human personalities.

See Hartley's Observations on Man (B.C), and Original Letters (B.C). See also B.Rand (B.Dii) and R.Marsh (B.Dii).

I shall refer, later, to the possible specific role that Hartley's theory may have played in the writing of The Ancient Mariner. See D.Waples (B.Dii).



but I want a Comforter. - I have done nothing - I have gone into Company - I was constantly at the Theatre here till they left us - I endeavoured to be perpetually with Miss Brunton - I even hoped, that her Exquisite Beauty and uncommon Accomplishments might have cured one Passion by another. The latter I could easily have dissipated in her absence - and so have restored my affections to her, whom I do not love - but whom by every tie of Reason and Honor I ought to love. I am resolved - but wretched! - But Time shall do much - you will easily believe that with such feelings I should have found it no easy Task to write to ---. I should have detested myself, if after my first Letter I had written coldly - how could I write as warmly?<sup>10</sup>

Southey's attention is explicitly drawn to Coleridge's awareness of a conflict between feeling and obligation. An inadequacy in Coleridge's scheme concerning the relation between feeling and principle at this date is made clear when he explains to Mary his past attitude towards her. In contrast with his feeling for Sara, Coleridge's feeling for Mary seemed spontaneous and instinctive, but in the following description he does not see it as such:

For four years I have endeavoured to smother a very ardent attachment - in what degree I have succeeded, you must know better than I can. With quick perceptions of moral Beauty it was impossible for me not to admire in you your sensibility regulated by Judgement, your Gaiety proceeding from a cheerful Heart acting on the stores of a strong Understanding. At first I voluntarily invited the recollection of these qualities into my mind - I made them the perpetual Object of my Reveries - yet I entertained no one Sentiment beyond that of the immediate Pleasure annexed to the thinking of You. At length it became an Habit. I awoke from the Delusion, and found that I had unwittingly harboured a Passion which I felt neither the power or the courage to subdue. My associations were irrevocably formed, and your Image was blended

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10. Griggs. 65. p. 113.

with every idea. I thought of you incessantly: yet that Spirit (if Spirit there be that condescends to record the lonely Beatings of my heart) that Spirit knows, that I thought of you with the purity of a Brother. Happy were I, had it been with no more than a Brother's ardor!

The Man of dependent fortune while he fosters an attachment commits an act of Suicide on his happiness. I possessed no Establishment - my views were very distant - I saw, that you regarded me merely with the kindness of a Sister - What expectations could I form? I formed no expectations - I was ever resolving to subdue the disquieting Passion: still some inexplicable Suggestion palsied my Efforts, and I clung with desperate fondness to this Phantom of Love, it's mysterious Attractions and hopeless Prospects. It was a faint and rayless Hope! Yet it soothed my Solitude with many a delightful day-dream. It was a faint and rayless Hope! Yet I nursed it in my Bosom with an Agony of Affection, even as a Mother her sickly Infant. -

But these are the poisoned Luxuries of a diseased Fancy! Indulge, Mary! this my first, my last request - and restore me to Reality, however gloomy.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of the underlying emotion conveyed by this letter, Coleridge's argument indicates that he has no conception of a feeling which is unlearned or unacquired. He talks about feelings within a theoretical associationist framework. He is so conscious that his relation to Mary was partly the result of his thinking and dreaming of that relationship that he begins to wonder whether the feeling had any real existence at all, or whether, perhaps, it was entirely self-induced by a process of association from his thoughts. On the strength of these comments the apparent difference in kind between his feelings for Mary and Sara becomes a difference of degree. Coleridge says that Mary's associations are irrevocable, but the passage does show how Coleridge can believe that with

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11. Griggs. 71. p. 130.

time, patience, and resolution, Mary's associations can be ousted and replaced by Sara's. The importance is that people are treated as ideas of perception in the intellect, so that, for Coleridge at this time, views concerning personal relationships are inseparable from epistemological opinions. The feelings about which Coleridge talks at this time are intellectually conceived feelings. Coleridge's theory does not allow him to recognise the unwilling emotion that he clearly felt.

At the time of the discussion of Pantisocracy it becomes apparent that the seeming conflict between reason and feeling is not a simple one. Coleridge is able to believe in the integration of reason and feeling because he sees both as products of mental activity. That mental activity, it is true, is conceived in such a way that the whole of sense experience is thought to be received into the mind so that, therefore, changes in attitude are not induced by, for instance, rational education alone, yet Coleridge makes no allowance for purely physical feelings which may be beyond the control of the mind. His attitude here is consonant with contemporary physiological opinion,<sup>12</sup> but that opinion is rapidly changing in the 1790's and we shall see that Coleridge was aware of the possible autonomy of physical functions through his acquaintance with the sick Charles Lloyd and his knowledge of the ideas of Thelwall, Beddoes, and others.<sup>13</sup> In 1794, however, Coleridge avoids the duality between mind and body by subsuming both reason and feeling under the mind. The duality in Southey's thinking exists because he identifies the mind with reason

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12. See, for instance, Erasmus Darwin. Zoonomia; or, the laws of organic life. London. 1796. Second edition, corrected. Section XVI. Of Instinct. p. 167.

13. See F. Fearing (B.Di) and also G. Gordon-Taylor & E. W. Walls (B.Di). See Part II. Chapter 9. for further references to medical developments in the 1790's.

and, uncertainly, the body with feeling. The source of Southey's confusion is in not knowing whether feeling is mental or physical with the result that he tries to reject it altogether. We must now return to Coleridge's letters to demonstrate these points. In a letter of December 9th, 1794, Coleridge again clearly reveals to Southey the nature of his thinking concerning Sara Fricker. With reference to her, he writes:

With regard to neglect respecting ---, do you accuse me justly? I have written 5 or 4 letters since my absence - received one. I am not conscious of having injured her otherwise, than by having mistaken the ebullience of schematism for affection, which a moment's reflection might have told me, is not a plant of so mushroom a growth - had it ever not been counteracted by a prior attachment/ but my whole Life has been a series of Blunders! God have mercy upon me - for I am a most miserable Dog -

The most criminal action of my Life was the 'first letter I wrote to ---.' I had worked myself to such a pitch, that I scarcely knew I was writing like an hypocrite. -

However it still remains for me to be externally Just though my Heart is withered within me - and Life seems now to give me disgust rather than pain - <sup>14</sup>

Nothing could be clearer than this statement. Coleridge acknowledges his mistake, and says that had it not been for the counter-action of Mary Evans the mistake might not have been disastrous. He still assumes here, with despondency, that Mary's associations are irrevocable, so that all that remains is for him to be externally just and to accept that his feelings must perish. On receiving confirmation from Mary in December that she was engaged to be married,<sup>15</sup> Coleridge replied in the same mood of fatalism:

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14. Griggs. 73. p. 132.

15. See Griggs. 76. p. 144.

To love you Habit has made unalterable. This passion however, divested, as it now is, of all Shadow of Hope, will lost it's disquieting power. Far distant from you I shall journey thro' the vale of Men in calmness. He cannot be wretched, who dares be actively virtuous.<sup>16</sup>

Writing to Southey on December 29th, Coleridge repeats his conviction that the habit of love for Mary is irreversible in almost the same words as in the letter to Mary, and then he continues:

Southey! my ideal Standard of female Excellence rises not above that Woman. But all Things work together for Good. Had I been united to her, the Excess of my Affection would have effeminated my Intellect. I should have fed on her looks as she entered into the Room - I should have gazed on her Footsteps when she went out from me. To lose her! - I can rise above that selfish Pang. But to marry another - O Southey! bear with my weakness. Love makes all things pure and heavenly like itself: - but to marry a woman whom I do not love - to degrade her, whom I call my wife, by making her the Instrument of low Desire - and on the removal of a desultory Appetite, to be perhaps not displeased with her Absence! - Enough! - These Refinements are the wildering Fires, that lead me into Vice.

Mark you, Southey! - I will do my Duty.<sup>17</sup>

Again, Coleridge makes no attempt to hide the gulf that lies between his feeling and his duty, but, even here, his comment on the possible effect of marriage to Mary Evans exposes his assumption that a relation to a person is the same as the reception of a sense impression so that the mind might be rendered excessively effeminate.<sup>18</sup> Coleridge expresses his view

16. Griggs. 76. p. 144.

17. Griggs. 77. p. 145.

18. Underlying this comment, too, is the assumption which Mary Wollstonecraft tried to combat in the Vindication of the Rights of Woman (B.C), that the opposition between reason and feeling is paralleled by the opposition between manhood and womanhood. (see. p. 73 and p. 166).

of the situation less dramatically in a letter to George Dyer,<sup>19</sup> written late in February, 1795:

In the Autumn of last year, you know, we formed our American plan, and with precipitance that did credit to our hearts rather than heads, fixed on the coming April as the time of our embarkation. This following circumstances have rendered impracticable - but there are other engagements not so dissoluble. In expectation of emigrating on the Pantisocratic Plan I payed my addresses to a young Lady, whom

‘ οὐτ’ ἀνέμω ἐστὶ κακὸς ὁ φίλος!’

- Independently of the Love and Esteem which her Person, and polished understanding may be supposed to have inspired into a young man, I consider myself as under particular Ties of Gratitude to her - since in confidence of my Affection she has rejected the Addresses of two men, one of them of large Fortune - and by her perseverant attachment to me disoblighd her Relations in a very uncomfortable Degree. - Perpetually obliged to resist the entreaties and to endure the reproachful admonitions of her Uncle &c, she vainly endeavours to conceal from me how heavy her heart is with anxiety, how disquieted by Suspense - To leave her for two or three years would, I fear, be sacrificing her health and happiness - In short, why should I write circuitously to you? So commanding are the requests of her Relations, that a short Time must decide whether she marries me whom she loves with an affection to the ardor of which my Deserts bear no proportion - or a man whom she strongly dislikes, in spite of his fortune and solicitous attentions to her. These peculiar circumstances she had with her usual Delicacy concealed from me till my arrival at Bristol.<sup>20</sup>

The last sentence partly explains the difference of tone in this letter, although the different recipient may explain it almost as much.

Practical aspects are considered in this letter and, as a result, there

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19. George Dyer (1755-1841) - 'author'. D.N.B. Vol. 16. pp. 28 4-5. also (B.C).

20. Griggs. 81. p. 151.



is more substance to Coleridge's sense of obligation. For the first time, the real situation seems to oblige Coleridge more than the pressure of Southey's influence.

Coleridge's correspondence for the middle part of 1795 is thin and we have no record of his feelings towards Sara Fricker between the date of the above letter and the date of the wedding on October 4th 1795, except, by the way, in a comment to Southey in August praising marriage as the highest of sublunary delights where, significantly perhaps, there is no mention of the person of Sara but rather of the abstraction, marriage.<sup>21</sup> The main corroboration of the view that Coleridge was trying to accomplish his duty by a transference of feeling rather than a renunciation of it comes in Coleridge's letter of November 13th, 1795 to Southey in which he announces and explains the breakdown of their friendship. It is important to realise here that Coleridge is anxious to prove that he did not fail in his duty but, nevertheless, his choice of expression is revealing:

Previously to my departure from Jesus College, and during my melancholy detention in London, what convulsive Struggles of Feeling I underwent, and what sacrifices I made, you know. The liberal Proposal from my Family affected me no farther than as it pained me to wound a revered Brother by the positive and immediate Refusal, which Duty compelled me to return. - But there was a - I need not be particular - You remember what a Fetter I burst, and that it snapt, as if it had been a Sinew of my Heart. However, I returned to Bristol, and my addresses to Sara, which I at first payed from Principle not Feeling, from Feeling & from Principle I renewed: and I met a reward more than proportionate to the greatness of the Effort. I love and I am beloved, and I am happy! - 22

21. See Griggs. 87. p. 158. See also my letters to the Times Literary Supplement on this matter during October, 1969.

22. Griggs. 93. p. 164.

The tone of the last sentence is not simply of ecstasy in love, but of a victory. Coleridge is proclaiming that through his perseverance his theory has been vindicated in that the determined conjunction of feeling with principle in his approach to Sara Fricker has resulted in a feeling of love for her where there had originally been nothing but a sense of duty. Simultaneously Coleridge is drawing Southey's attention to his constancy in not shirking his duty, involving himself in a great effort, and is also drawing his late friend's attention to the efficacy of the associationist method.

However, this is to leap ahead in time, and we must return to the discussions of Pantisocracy in the Autumn of 1794. Coleridge's effort with regard to himself, as we have seen in relation to Sara Fricker, and also with regard to the Pantisocratic scheme was to break down the opposition between feeling and duty. He was conscious of the difference, but by making duty habitual he wished to transform it into a natural feeling. Coleridge's problem was that he could not, in all cases, dispense with the need for a primary obligation which could then be rendered feeling-ful.<sup>23</sup> By what criterion, for instance, could he assess that the obligation posed by Sara was one which merited the transference of his feelings? Coleridge believed in a mechanism for transforming obligations into feelings, but had no grounds for establishing which obligations were of ultimate value. To take an extreme case - a hypothetical but portentous one - if Southey had asserted that Coleridge had to kill Mary Evans in order to demonstrate the constancy of his design to renounce personal feelings for the benefit of a greater good, on what theoretical grounds could Coleridge have questioned this obligation? In practice it certainly seemed as if Coleridge met his obligation to Sara

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23. This is the problem which emerges from Paley's moral philosophy. See Part II. Introduction. (13)n.

Fricker mainly because it was an obligation rather than because of the kind of obligation that it constituted.

Even the practical considerations mentioned in the letter to George Dyer were not such as to have obligatory weight unless one were predisposed that they should. Even if Coleridge did not isolate his difficulty in theoretical terms, the corollary to his thinking at this period revolves around the problem of how one can know whether the necessary primary obligation is correct. Is reason the originator of obligation, or is there a basic feeling prior to obligation which is different in kind from the feelings which eventually transform that obligation? Coleridge's main position is that the uncorrupted relation between a mother and a child establishes correct obligation and correct feeling simultaneously, so that this pristine relationship is the actual manifestation of the fusion of feeling and duty about which Godwin theorised in such an utopian manner. Coleridge's rigid conception of Pantisocracy was, essentially, that in the absence of adverse influences and associations this pure fusion might be preserved throughout life. On this view, there is little theoretical problem about babies in the Pantisocracy - indeed, they are the hope of the future perfectibility of the whole society when they, in turn, become parents, but the crucial difficulty is that an ideal society cannot commence *ex nihilo*. Coleridge believed that the correct feelings could be induced in adults by the method that he was practising in relation to Sara Fricker, and he also believed that as long as the society preserved modes of behaviour which corresponded with the correct feelings there could be no danger that these feelings would be corrupted by association. Hence Coleridge had three main fears for the success of the Pantisocratic scheme.

The first was that perhaps the women adults would not sufficiently assimilate the correct feelings, with the result that their infants would

be corrupted from the moment of birth; the second fear was that un-egalitarian social structures might be introduced which would necessarily pervert proper feelings; and the third fear was that children might be accepted into the community who were old enough to have gathered bad associations from a 'morbid' environment and yet not old enough to have the constancy of will which was necessary to transform those false principles into good. Several points emerge. On the first count, it is clear that Coleridge has no view at this time of the innate goodness of the infant child, with the result that the interest which he takes in the child is finally subservient to the interest in the parent because the fusion of feeling and obligation in the child is learned and therefore dependent on the degree of fusion achieved by the parent. Thus for the child, as for the parent, the criteria for the choice of the primary obligation remain obscure. Ideally, for Coleridge, the life of the child is the pure enactment of a choice already made by the parent - singular since Coleridge seems to pay no regard to the associative significance of the father, but this purity is of process, of becoming, and bears no relation to the moral worth of the being that is integrated in this manner. The nature of the being depends on the nature of the obligation initially accepted, and Coleridge offers no theoretical grounds for the nature of that first choice. It was on the second and third counts that there was greatest disagreement with Southey. The latter wished to take his household with him to America and did not imagine that his servants would need to be freed.

Southey could not see Coleridge's point here, or did not wish to see it, because he had never fully accepted that the performance of a social role might corrupt the mind more powerfully than rational education could

improve it.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, when it came to the point, Southey was not prepared to renounce family feelings for a more general benevolence.<sup>25</sup> We thus have the ironical situation that Coleridge attacks Southey for being swayed by feelings into wishing that his relations should be allowed to go to America. The irony is more poignant because at this time Coleridge is prepared to admit the value of family feeling, and this would probably be one of the points on which he considered himself to be at variance with Godwin. The difference between Southey and Coleridge on this issue is that Southey is thinking more in terms of natural feelings such as filial affection, whereas Coleridge conceives of the family environment as a convenient embodiment of 'habit'. For Coleridge, the family constitutes a useful group which fosters the learned feelings of the child in a setting beyond the associations of the mother alone, before the child then moves out into a wider society. The family is an instrument for the transformation of society,<sup>26</sup> whilst, in relation to the Pantisocracy, Southey's commitment to his family seemed to be elevating a means to the position of an end, and Coleridge clearly felt that the importation of Southey's family into society would be the importation of a body of prejudication rather than an associative force for social welfare.

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24. Because, in other words, Southey had never been able to accept Hartley, in spite of the fact that Coleridge had obviously encouraged him to borrow Hartley's Observations on Man immediately from the Bristol Library. Southey borrowed vol. I from July 8th - August 7th, 1794, and again from January 21st - March 27th, 1795, and vol. 2 from August 7th - August 22nd, 1794. (See G. Whalley. "The Bristol Library Borrowings of Southey and Coleridge 1793-8". (B.Dii).)

25. It was this renunciation of 'family feeling' that Southey felt, with justification, that Godwin required.

26. Compare with Coleridge's thinking in the Political Lectures. See Part II. Chapter 2.



Three letters written in the autumn of 1794 give the main suggestions for the picture of Coleridge's attitude at this time which has just been presented. The first was written to Southey from Cambridge on October 21st and it begins with the reference to Mary Evans' letter which has already been noticed. The second letter, also to Southey, followed immediately after the first on October 23rd and indicates a greater concern for the philosophical basis of the Pantisocratic venture resulting from a cross-examination to which Coleridge was obviously subjected in the evening of October 22nd. The third letter was also written to Southey from Cambridge on November 3rd, 1794. In the first of these three letters, Coleridge writes:

- I was vexed too and alarmed by your letter concerning Mr & Mrs Roberts, Shad & little Sally - I was wrong, very wrong in the affair of Shad - & have given you Reason to suppose, that I should assent to this Innovation - I will most assuredly go with you to America on this Plan - but remember, Southey! this is not our Plan - nor can I defend it. 'Shad's children will be educated as our's - and the Education we shall give them will be such as to render them incapable of blushing at the want of it in their Parents'. - PERHAPS! With this one Word would every Lilliputian Reasoner demolish the System. Wherever Men can be vicious, some will be. The leading Idea of Pantisocracy is to make men necessarily virtuous by removing all Motives to Evil - all possible Temptations. 'Let them dine with us and be treated with as much equality as they would wish - but perform that part of Labor for which their Education has fitted them' - Southey should not have written this Sentence - my Friend, my noble and high-souled Friend should have said - to his Dependents - Be my Slaves - and ye shall be my Equals - to his Wife & Sisters - Resign the Name of Ladyship and ye shall retain the thing. - Again - Is every Family to possess one of these Unequal Equals - these Helot Egalité-s?.....<sup>27</sup>

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27. Griggs. 65. pp. 113-4.



Coleridge attacks Southey for modifying the original plan. The difference of opinion settles upon the idea of necessity. Southey had obviously proposed that Shad should go to America. Coleridge had already agreed to this in a previous letter - 'Shad is my brother'.<sup>28</sup> In the letter to which Coleridge is replying, Southey clearly had envisaged education as the equaliser of the Pantisocratic society and had imagined that otherwise everyone should remain in his or her social stratum. This deduction from Coleridge's quotations certainly reflects Southey's belief in reason, and that education alone will gradually establish an egalitarian society. By contrast, Coleridge conceives of a society that will necessarily include equality. For necessity to take effect, every aspect of life must be equal so that practice is established by experience rather than simply by reason. If there is the possibility of vice, then there will be vice, and hence any source of possibility must be removed. Coleridge is taking seriously Southey's emphasis on motive and external impulsion, but, unlike Southey, he recognises other than rational motives; he sees that ways of life induce certain habits, and he returns to his earlier clear conviction that names condition attitudes.

In the letter written two days later, Coleridge expresses his anxiety more forcefully. He writes:

Last night, dear Southey! I received a special Invitation from Dr. Edwards (the great Grecian of Cambridge and heterodox Divine) to drink Tea and spend the Evening - I there met a counsellor whose name is Lushington - a Democrat - and a man of the most powerful and Briarean Intellect - I was challenged on the subject of Pantisocracy, which is indeed the universal Topic at this University - A Discussion began and continued for six hours. In conclusion, Lushington & Edwards declared the System impregnable, supposing the assigned Quantum of Virtue and Genius in the first Individuals.

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28. See Griggs. 59. p. 103.

I came home at one o'clock this morning exulting in the honest Consciousness of having exhibited closer argument in more elegant and appropriate Language, than I had ever conceived myself capable of.

Then my heart smote me - for I saw your Letter on the propriety of taking Servants with us. - I had answered that Letter - and feel conviction that you will perceive the error, into which the Tenderness of your Nature had led you. But other Queries obtruded themselves on my Understanding - The more perfect our System is - supposing the necessary Premises - the more eager in anxiety am I - that the necessary Premises should exist.<sup>29</sup>

There is confusion, here, over the usage of 'feelings'. Coleridge is claiming that Southey has been misguided by tender feelings and is thereby endangering the system. Particular feelings which may be natural nevertheless endanger general feelings. Here it becomes clear that Coleridge sees a conflict in kinds of feeling, whereas Southey sees the conflict as between feeling and duty. For Southey, the duty is an end, whereas for Coleridge the rationally conceived goal must be vivified by feelings which have been transferred from a limited particular context. The apparent irony that Coleridge is attacking Southey for being betrayed by feelings appears in the letter of November 3rd. Coleridge writes:

My feeble and exhausted Heart regards with a criminal indifference the Introduction of Servitude into our Society -; but my Judgement is not asleep: nor can I suffer your Reason, Southey! to be entangled in the web, which your feelings have woven. Oxen and Horses possess not intellectual Appetites - nor the powers of acquiring them. We are therefore Justified in employing their Labor to our own Benefit - Mind hath a divine Right of Sovereignty over Body - But who shall dare to transfer this Reasoning from 'from Man to Brute' and 'from Man to Man (!)'! To be employed in the Toil of the Field while We are pursuing philosophical Studies - can Earldoms or Emperorships boast so huge an Inequality? Is

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29. Griggs. 66. pp. 118-9.

there a human Being of so torpid a Nature, as that placed in our Society he would not feel it? - A willing Slave is the worst of Slaves - His Soul is a Slave.<sup>30</sup>

and a little later in the same letter he adds:

I wish, Southey! in the stern severity of Judgement, that the two Mothers were not to go and that the children stayed with them - Are you wounded by my want of feeling? No! how highly must I think of your rectitude of Soul, that I should dare to say this to so affectionate a Son! That Mrs Fricker - we shall have her teaching the Infants Christianity, - I mean - that mongrel whelp that goes under it's name - teaching them by stealth in some ague-fit of Superstition! - <sup>31</sup>

Coleridge is prepared to defend family feeling as it is created in an ideal vacuum, but not as a pre-existent structure which cuts across wider horizons of sympathy. Coleridge wants to harness the power of family feeling and in doing so he wishes to detach that power from the context which is its source. The analogy is significant since it is one which Coleridge himself makes a little later when he describes the possible function of the press in a 'morbid' society.<sup>32</sup>

These three letters provide the climax of the theoretical debate concerning Pantisocracy between Coleridge and Southey. However, even before the end of 1794 enthusiasm for the scheme was beginning to fade.

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30. Griggs. 68. pp. 121-2.

31. Griggs. 68. p. 123.

32. See The Plot Discovered. p. 45. (Patton & Mann. p. 313).

## CHAPTER II

1795: The Political Lectures

As we have seen, the discussion concerning the underlying philosophy of Pantisocracy reached its climax in the autumn and early winter of 1794. The difference between Coleridge and Southey at this time led, first of all, to compromises in the scheme, and, finally, to the break-down of the friendly relationship between the two poets. During the course of 1795 each became eager to pin the label of apostate on the other. There is no need to attempt to act as judge in this case. Such an appraisal of the situation has no importance for this study. Instead we need to decide what, finally, was the influence of Southey's thought and behaviour on the personality of Coleridge, or, more significantly, on the way Coleridge viewed his own personality and conceived the nature of personality abstractly. We also need to look at the way in which Coleridge set about the task of adapting the ideas which he had formulated for the creation of a 'new' society to the ordinary society which he and Southey chose to call 'Morbid'.<sup>1</sup> The answers to these questions are most clearly found in the Political Lectures which Coleridge delivered in the early part of 1795.

Coleridge delivered three political lectures in the period between late January and early March, 1795. The first was published late in February under the title A Moral and Political Lecture, and it was revised and republished in November as the Introductory Address to Conciones ad Populum. This latter publication contained a lecture entitled On the Present War which consisted of the second and possibly parts of the third lecture that had been delivered in February. Coleridge's 'third' political lecture of 1795 which was, therefore, in fact, the fourth, was delivered as a Lecture on the Two Bills on November, 26th, 1795, and

1. For Southey's realisation that Godwin's theories were utopian, see a letter to Grosvenor Bedford of October 1st, 1795. In C.C. Southey. The Life and Correspondence. Vol. I. p. 247. (B.C).

published as The Plot Discovered, after revision and expansion, in the same month.<sup>2</sup>

Although The Plot Discovered was the last lecture to be 'delivered', it provides the most useful introduction to the nature and scope of Coleridge's thinking in the whole group. It was 'delivered' against ministerial treason. Habeas Corpus had been suspended on May 17th, 1794, and state trials for treason were held between October and December of that year. Tooke,<sup>3</sup> Hardy<sup>4</sup> and Thelwall<sup>5</sup> were acquitted, but the government continued to encroach upon the liberty of the people. Government attempts to limit the liberty of the press and freedom of speech constituted the

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2. (See Patton & Mann. pp. xxv-xxxiii). I use the Introductory Address as my source for what, throughout, I call A Moral and Political Lecture, and I use The Plot Discovered as my source for the lecture which was delivered as a Lecture on the Two Bills. Since the publication of Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion (ed. L. Patton & P. Mann) it has become possible to compare the published texts with the notes for the lectures as delivered. I shall attempt to draw attention to any significant alterations in the passages to which I refer in my text. In my treatment of the lectures in the text, therefore, I work from the publications with which, presumably, Coleridge was satisfied in November, 1795, although I discuss them as a group as if they all belong to the February/March period of the year. Hence I treat the Political Lectures chronologically before the Theological Lectures in spite of the exception of The Plot Discovered. Thematic considerations over-ruled the strict chronology which is followed in the new edition. Close attention to Coleridge's revisions, may indicate that there is significant change from February to November, 1795, but for the purpose of my discussion of the relationship between Coleridge's political and theological positions I have been prepared to become temporarily, and, perhaps necessarily, a-historical in my analysis.
  3. John Horne Tooke (1736-1812).
  4. Thomas Hardy (1752-1832) - 'radical politician'. D.N.B. Vol. 24. pp. 357-8.
  5. See Part II. Chapter 5.

real treason in Coleridge's view. The Treason and Convention Bills were introduced on November 6th and 10th respectively, by Lord Grenville and William Pitt, and were put into effect on December 18th. At the time of Coleridge's lecture, the Treason Bill had passed its third reading in the Lords and its second in the Commons, and the Convention Bill had passed its first reading in the Commons and had not yet been introduced into the Lords.<sup>6</sup>

The most immediately striking feature of The Plot Discovered is the similarity of many of the attitudes to the orthodox line of rational dissent of which Coleridge would have been particularly aware from the speeches of William Frend which he had heard as an undergraduate.<sup>7</sup> The rational position with its specific connotations as manifested in Unitarianism is evident in the following opening passage:

"THE MASS OF THE PEOPLE HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THE LAWS, BUT TO OBEY THEM!" - Ere yet this foul treason against the majesty of man, ere yet this blasphemy against the goodness of God be registered among our statutes, I enter my protest! Ere yet our laws as well as our religion be muffled up in mysteries, as a CHRISTIAN I protest against this worse than Pagan darkness!<sup>8</sup>

In objecting to the idea of obedience to laws with which people have nothing to do, Coleridge is rebelling against the notion of objectivity. This form of mindless obedience that is required is treason against the majesty of man because it scorns his reason, and it is blasphemy against God because He endowed man with reason above the beasts. Coleridge objects to 'mysteries' because both Law and Religion must be rationally explicable. Elaborating

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6. For a general survey of the political atmosphere of the 1790's, see J.H.Plumb (B.Di) Part III. The Age of Pitt. Also see C. Hobhouse (B.Di).

7. See Part II. Introduction. (6) n.

8. The Plot Discovered. p. 3. (Patton & Mann. p. 285).



his position, Coleridge continues:

In all ministerial measures there are two reasons, the real, and the ostensible. The ostensible reason of the present Bill we have heard; the real reason will not elude the search of common sagacity. The existing laws of Treason were too clear, too unequivocal. Judges indeed (what will not Judges do?) Judges might endeavour to transfer to these laws their own flexibility; Judges might make strange interpretations. But English Juries could not, would not understand them. Hence instead of eight hecatombs of condemned traitors behold eight triumphant acquitted felons! *Hinc illae lacrymae.* - The present Bills were conceived and laid in the dunghill of despotism among the other yet unhatched eggs of the old Serpent. In due time and in fit opportunity they crawled into light. Genius of Britain! crush them!<sup>9</sup>

The new measures were really taken to obscure the existing laws of Treason. Implicit in Coleridge's attitude, therefore, is the feeling that law must be as clear and as universally known as possible. In this, Coleridge is like Frend. Paley had advocated flexibility and expediency, but Coleridge is hostile to this position because he identifies expediency with malice on the part of the government.<sup>10</sup> Like Frend again, Coleridge here expresses belief in Juries, not in Judges, and he regards the recent trials as the vindication of the Jury system. The following words could be Frend's:

But I hear it suggested, that the two Acts will not be administered in all their possible stretch of implication! Pale-hearted men, who cannot approve, yet who dare not oppose a most foul ministry, is it come to this, that Britons should depend on clemency not justice, that Britons should whine to Ministers to stand between them and the law?<sup>11</sup>

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9. The Plot Discovered. pp. 6-7. (Patton & Mann. p. 288).
10. For Paley's attitude, see The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy. Bk. VI. Section VIII. Of the administration of justice. in Works. (B.C). Vol. IV. p. 419.
11. The Plot Discovered. pp. 11-12. (Patton & Mann. p. 291)

This is the rigid legalism that Frennd had represented in opposition to Milner in Coleridge's days as an undergraduate.

Nevertheless, this lecture also contains Coleridge's typical insistence on the primacy of feeling. Coleridge argues that, in origin, Majesty meant the unity of the people, the weight imparted by the majority. The ancient Lex Majestatis or Law of Treason was intended against those who injured the People. It is in this context that he claims that the feelings of the people are sacred, and that the bills now under consideration prohibit the expression of these feelings. Coleridge says:

The Bill now pending is indeed as full-foliaged, as the Manchineel tree; (and like the manchineel, will poison those who are fools enough to slumber beneath it) but its import is briefly this - first, that the people of England should possess no unrestrained right of consulting in common on common grievances: and secondly, that Mr. Thelwall should no longer give political lectures.<sup>12</sup>

Coleridge develops this reference to Thelwall. His main argument is that the voice of an individual is suppressed by a government which is aware that it is the voice of the whole people and not just of an individual. In making this point, Coleridge makes explicit several assumptions concerning true and false feelings. He remarks:

The public amusements at the Theatre are already under ministerial controul. And if the tremendous sublimity of Schiller, if 'the Robbers' can be legally suppressed by that thing yclept a Lord Chamberlain, in point of literary exhibition it would be unreasonable for Mr. Thelwall to complain. But in proportion as he feels himself of little consequence he will perceive the situation of the ministry is desperate. Nothing could make him of importance but that he speaks the feelings of multitudes. The feelings of men are always founded in truth. The modes of expressing them may be blended with error, and the feelings themselves may lead to the most abhorred excess. Yet still they are originally right: they teach

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12. The Plot Discovered. p. 19. (Patton & Mann. p. 296)

man that something is wanting, something which he ought to have. Now if the premier with the influence of the wealthy and the prejudices of the ignorant on his side, were evidently struggling to supply these perceived desiderata, could an unsupported malcontent oppose him? Alas! it is the vice of this nation, that if a minister merely promise to increase the comforts or enlarge the liberties of the people, he instantly conjures up such a wild and overwhelming popularity, as enables him to execute with impunity the most ruinous schemes against both. But William Pitt knows, that Thelwall is the voice of tens of thousands, and he levels his parliamentary thunder-bolts against him with the same emotion with which Caligula wished to see the whole Roman state brought together in one neck, that he might have the luxury of beheading it at one moment. But we shall revert to this clause in due time, and gird ourselves up to this consideration of the restrictions of the right of petitioning.<sup>13</sup>

In the few sentences discussing feeling, Coleridge begins to grapple with the problem which is to concern him most when he later enters into correspondence with Thelwall. Coleridge had always assumed that correct feelings would necessarily manifest themselves in correct behaviour, and that, therefore, to assess the behaviour of a person was the same thing as to assess the feelings of that person. The problem was that Hartleian association tried to combine this theory of an internal necessity of expression with the theory that expression and external impression also necessarily affected the personality. With regard to expression the Hartleian position was circular since if there was an internal necessity of association of which expression was the end-product, that product could hardly corrupt the process of which it was itself the culmination.

With regard to external impression, the Hartleian position tended to overlook the continuity of such impressions. Hartley tended to postulate

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13. The Plot Discovered. pp. 19-20. (Patton & Mann. pp. 296-7)

two significant static moments, the first of which was the moment when the mind initially received associations from external impression, and the second of which was the moment when the mind reached a stage of final perfection after a process of internal amelioration developing from those initial impressions. No allowance was made for inter-play between inner and outer.<sup>14</sup> Coleridge had held both aspects of the Hartleian view and was confronted by the problem that I have detailed. He had always wanted to insist that external impressions modified internal feelings, but he had hardly reconciled this view with his belief in an inner necessity. The progress of the French Revolution seemed to illustrate clearly that correct feelings could be corrupted disastrously. Was Coleridge to conclude that there can be disparity between an original feeling and its expression, or was he to retain a belief in necessity which would lead him to deduce that the atrocities of the French Revolution proved the falsity of its underlying feelings? The passage cited above shows that he chose the former course, that his tenacious grip on necessity loosened slightly. He accepts that 'modes of expressing' feelings may be in error, and that the feelings themselves, although pure and truthful, 'may lead to the most abhorred excesses'. The solution that Coleridge finds here has a Miltonic ring, as do many of the sentiments expressed in the lectures. Miltonic platonism was the main

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14. See the following passage from Hartley's Observations on Man (B.C). Part II. Proposition 69. p. 291:

"For though our Affections are not directly and immediately subject to the voluntary Power, yet our Actions are; and consequently our Affections also mediately. He that at first practises Acts of Benevolence by Constraint, and continues to practise them, will at last have associated such a Variety of Pleasures with them, as to transfer a great instantaneous Pleasure upon them and beget in himself the Affections from which they naturally flow. In like manner, if we abstain from malevolent Actions, we shall dry up the ill Passions, which are their Sources." (My italics).

concrete source for the kind of Shaftesburyanism that began to transform Coleridge's Rousseauistic leanings and to plug the hole that experience of personal and political realities had made in Hartleian necessarianism.<sup>15</sup> Feelings still do not have the status of innate ideas, but Coleridge uses the idea of ignorance and error to explain the corruption of pure feeling. Rational misunderstanding corrupts purity of heart. But if correct generalised feelings are learnt and are the particular human feelings directed to a different, rationally ascertained, context, how can one be sure that this first rational direction is not a misunderstanding of the general situation? If Coleridge is to retain his belief in learnt feelings and the possible manipulation of feelings, he must now be prepared to accept that these original feelings may be mislearnt and falsely manipulated. By accepting that reason can destroy the purity of feeling, Coleridge must assert the purity of feeling before experience and before reason if he is to remain an optimist, and if he is to accept the a priori goodness of feeling he must accept human feelings as they are, in their particular, natural context before their manipulation for the purposes of a rationally considered social utility. Paradoxically, the rejection of Hartley's kind of necessarian position involves the rejection of the possibility of

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15. See Part II. Chapter 3. (7)n and (8)n. Milton was certainly not the only origin of the change in Coleridge's thinking in 1795, but this is not the place to develop arguments for other possible influences. Coleridge's reading of Akenside may have familiarised him with Leibniz, and his reading of Cudworth must also have presented the case of the Platonic tradition in England. For Coleridge's reading at this time, see G. Whalley. "The Bristol Library Borrowings of Southey and Coleridge 1793-8." (B.Dii). See R. Cudworth (B.C) and J. A. Passmore (B.Di); C. E. Lowrey (B.Di); Paul Janet (B.Di). See M. Akenside (B.C) and R. W. Chapman (B.Dii); J. Hart (B.Dii); G. R. Potter (B.Dii); W. L. Renwick (B.Dii).



transforming humans and human society.

Not only does Coleridge accept the disjunction of feeling and behaviour, but also the discussion of sedition causes him to recognise that the truth of feeling is prior to verbal expression and is often distorted by it.

Coleridge says in this context:

Our ancestors were wisely cautious in framing the bill of treason; they would not admit words as sufficient evidences of intention. How often does the tongue utter what the moment after the heart disapproves! these indiscretions are blameable in the individual, but the frequency of them was honourable to the nation at large, as it demonstrated the unsuspecting spirit of a free government, too proud to be jealous! - <sup>16</sup>

Coleridge starts from the same point in arguing that it is specious to suppose that a malicious kind of censure can be isolated for punishment:

All censure tends to excite dislike; to forbid all discourses and publications that may tend to produce dislike of his Majesty, is in other words, to bestow on the first magistrate of a free country an immunity from all censure. I am aware, it will be objected, that such discourse or book must have been uttered or published maliciously. But will the offender himself plead guilty to thy malicious intention? and if he himself does not plead guilty, what witnesses can be brought against the secrets of the heart? The law must in these cases judge of the intentions by the effect; and where the effect is strong and clear, a complaisant Judge will always find himself incapable of conceiving, how it could be produced, if not maliciously.<sup>17</sup>

In both these passages there is the sense that the real human motivations are sub-verbal and that a good government should allow for the inter-play of persons rather than conduct affairs on the basis of an inter-play of words.

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16. The Plot Discovered. p. 11. (Patton & Mann. p. 291)

17. The Plot Discovered. pp. 14-15. (Patton & Mann. p. 293.)



The immediate effect of Coleridge's acceptance that feeling could be totally corrupted by erroneous reason was to ensure that correct reasons were inculcated rather than to investigate the nature of the feeling which was before experience. Coleridge had under-rated reason when it was opposed to feeling as a rival determinant of the nature of a person, but as Coleridge's view of feeling gradually became equated with his conception of being itself, so he became prepared to accept the subsidiary modifying influence of reason, and to see that if the feeling self is beyond or before experience then the only way to alter persons is to influence reason's subsidiary role. Hence Coleridge's combination of a strong belief in both feeling and reason in his Political Lectures.

The introduction to A Moral and Political Lecture begins with an analysis of the audience of the lecture and also of the present state of the French Revolution. In this analysis Coleridge uses phrases which are sometimes reminiscent of Southey. The important point is that Coleridge now systematically accepts the need for 'fixed principles' to modify the force of the feeling self, whereas Southey had tried to make rationality the essence of being. Coleridge begins the lecture which he delivered first of the three in the following manner:

Companies resembling the present will, from a variety of circumstances, consist chiefly of the zealous Advocates for Freedom. It will therefore be our endeavour, not so much to excite the torpid, as to regulate the feelings of the ardent: and above all, to evince the necessity of bottoming on fixed Principles, that so we may not be the unstable Patriots of Passion or Accident, nor hurried away by names of which we have not sifted the meaning, and by tenets of which we have not examined the consequences. The Times are trying; and in order to be prepared against their difficulties, we should have acquired a prompt facility of adverting in all our doubts to some grand and comprehensive Truth. In a deep and strong Soil must that Tree fix its Roots, the height of which is to "reach to Heaven, and

the Sight of it to the ends of all the Earth".

The Example of France is indeed a "Warning to Britain". A Nation wading to their Rights through Blood, and marking the track of Freedom by Devastation! Yet let us not embattle our Feelings against our Reason. Let us not indulge our malignant Passions under the mask of Humanity. Instead of railing with infuriate declamation against these excesses, we shall be more profitably employed in developing the sources of them. French Freedom is the Beacon, which while it guides to Equality, should shew us the Dangers that throng the road.<sup>18</sup>

Coleridge is making a plea for rationality and sanity in highly emotional times. He has recourse to the form of an objective criterion in that he argues that actions should be assessed in the light of a 'comprehensive Truth'. This form, in fact, embraces the product of Coleridge's thinking concerning the supremacy of feeling, for the 'comprehensive Truth' to which Coleridge refers without elaboration, must, by implication, involve the principle that person-to-person relationships are of prime importance before all verbal rationalisations. This understanding of Coleridge's assumption is able to make sense of the second paragraph of his lecture. The original feelings which were the foundations of the French impetus for freedom should not be rejected because our feelings are outraged by the atrocities in France. Our reason must channel our feeling so that we accept that French feeling went astray because it was not controlled by reason. If our feelings in reaction are not controlled as the original French feelings should have been, then our reaction is in danger of being as atrocious as are the manifestations of French lack of control. It would not matter that our feelings could react under 'the mask of Humanity'; indeed, French feeling went sour under the same mask. The criterion which must be consulted is not the kind of abstraction, like 'Humanity', which becomes

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18. Conciones ad Populum. pp.8-9. (Patton & Mann. pp.33-4)

detached from feeling, but the grand belief in feeling itself as a 'comprehensive Truth', the belief in a sub-verbal form of human empathy. Coleridge's hatred of abstractions is not unlike Burke's,<sup>19</sup> but he would differ radically from Burke because he would argue that, mistakenly, Burke had rejected the 'thing' as well as the 'name' of Freedom. French Freedom had taken a wrong turning and had become systematised and inhuman, but this did not mean that true human relationships in freedom were impossible. French Freedom had become corrupted because the abstraction had become the belief of an intelligent elite, whilst there had been no attempt to foster the practice of 'openness' by sharing freedom through a process of democratization. Coleridge makes this point in his next paragraph:

The Annals of the French Revolution have recorded in Letters of Blood, that the Knowledge of the Few cannot counteract the Ignorance of the Many; that the Light of Philosophy, when it is confined to a small Minority, points out the Possessors as the Victims, rather than the Illuminators, of the Multitude. The Patriots of France either hastened into the dangerous and gigantic Error of making certain Evil the means of contingent Good, or were sacrificed by the Mob, with whose prejudices and ferocity their unbending Virtue forbade them to assimilate.<sup>20</sup>

Coleridge proceeds to examine the dilemma of some of the French leaders. His comments on the Girondists are interesting because, certainly viewing from a later date, they might also seem to be self-regarding:

Men of genius are rarely either prompt in action or consistent in general conduct: their early habits have been those of contemplative indolence; and the day-dreams, with which they have been accustomed to amuse their solitude, adapt them for splendid speculation, not temperate and practicable counsels.<sup>21</sup>

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19. For Burke, see (B.C), and also C.Parkin (B.Di); A.Cobban (B.Di).

20. Consiones ad Populum. p. 9. (Patton & Mann. p. 34).

21. Conciones ad Populum. p.10. (Patton & Mann. p. 34).

The phrase Coleridge uses to describe Brissot<sup>22</sup> - 'a sublime visionary'<sup>23</sup> - forces the likeness home, but clearly at the time of speaking Coleridge wishes to hold such speculators in contempt. His main objection to Robespierre is that his idealism became abstracted from practical possibility:

I rather think, that the distant prospect, to which he was travelling, appeared to him grand and beautiful; but that he fixed his eye on it with such intense eagerness as to neglect the foulness of the road. If however his first intentions were pure, his subsequent enormities yield us a melancholy proof, that it is not the character of the possessor which directs the power, but the power which shapes and depraves the character of the possessor. In Robespierre, its influence was assisted by the properties of his disposition. - Enthusiasm, even in the gentlest temper, will frequently generate sensations of an unkindly order. If we clearly perceive any one thing to be of vast and infinite importance to ourselves and all mankind, our first feelings impel us to turn with angry contempt from those, who doubt and oppose it. The ardor of undisciplined benevolence seduces us into malignity: and whenever our hearts are warm, and our objects great and excellent, intolerance is the sin that does most easily beset us. But this enthusiasm in Robespierre was blended with gloom, and suspiciousness, and inordinate vanity.<sup>24</sup>

Coleridge himself had become an enthusiast of Pantisocracy to such an extent that he had become intolerant of Southey's warmth of feeling for his family. Later in the lecture Coleridge does not let Southey's type of apostasy escape unmentioned,<sup>25</sup> but his comments here illustrate his own

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22. Jean-Pierre Brissot (1754-1793). *Biographie Universelle*. Vol.5. pp. 568-70.

23. *Conciones ad Populum*. p. 10. (*Patton & Mann*. p. 35).

24. *Conciones ad Populum*. p. 11. (*Patton & Mann*. p. 35).

25. See *Conciones ad Populum*. p. 19. (*Patton & Mann*. p. 40) and also *Conciones ad Populum*. p. 32. (*Patton & Mann*. p. 48). This last passage runs:

"All that can delight the poor man's senses or strengthen

newly moderated attitude. Love and tolerance are the keynotes of this lecture, and an emphasis on acceptance of persons regardless of their sentiments or their behaviour, both of which are superficial adjuncts to the real self. Coleridge's lectures themselves are evidence of a practical desire to communicate, and this desire is sustained later in the publication of 'The Watchman'.

In the analysis of kinds of Democrats which follows the account of the progress of the French Revolution, Coleridge begins by condemning the fact that both theology and political ideology are judged as abstractions without reference to persons. The limited ground that is shared with Burke is again apparent:

The majority of Democrats appear to me to have attained that portion of knowledge in politics, which infidels possess in religion. I would by no means be supposed to imply, that the objections of both are equally unfounded, but that they both attribute to the system which they reject, all the evils existing under it; and that both contemplating truth and justice "in the nakedness of abstraction", condemn constitutions and dispensations without having sufficiently examined the natures, circumstances, and capacities of their recipients.<sup>26</sup>

Coleridge distinguishes three kinds of false Democrat. The first class comprises those whose opinions depend entirely on the reports of what is happening in France, and who therefore oscillate without fixed principles.

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his understanding, you preclude; yet with generous condescension you would bid him exclaim "LIBERTY and EQUALITY!" because, forsooth, he should possess the same Right to an Hovel which you claim to a Palace".

In a note, Patton & Mann suggest that this may be directed against Burke, but it is possible that an attack nearer to home is intended if the similarity between the argument employed here and that used against Southey in Griggs. 65. p.114 is noted. Hence Coleridge had used this argument against Southey as early as October, 1794.

26. Conciones ad Populum. p. 14. (Patton & Mann). p. 37.

The second class comprises militant enthusiasts. The idea of force gains popularity in unenlightened minds and amongst those who are underprivileged. Coleridge accepts that these people are beyond the reach of rational persuasion. In the following passage, tolerance figures as the ideal and Coleridge begins to realise that in some circumstances this ideal can only be communicated by subsidiary feelings rather than subsidiary reason. Feelings must now come to the aid of the insistence on personhood which had been derived from them. In other words, Coleridge still has insufficient faith in the ability of the true feeling self to assert itself so that when rational control is inapplicable, indirect control by feeling must be exerted from without. This is a retreat to the Rousseauistic position as manifested in 'Emile'.<sup>27</sup> Coleridge says:

The purifying alchemy of Education may transmute the fierceness of an ignorant man into virtuous energy - but what remedy shall we apply to him, whom Plenty has not softened, whom Knowledge has not taught Benevolence? This is one among the many fatal effects which result from the want of fixed principles. Convinced that vice is error, we shall entertain sentiments of Pity for the vicious, not of Indignation - and even with respect to that bad Man, to whom we have before alluded, altho' we are now groaning beneath the burthen of his misconduct, we shall harbour no sentiments of Revenge; but rather condole with him that his chaotic Iniquities have exhibited such a complication of extravagance, inconsistency, and rashness as may alarm him with apprehensions of approaching lunacy!<sup>28</sup>

We shall see shortly that Coleridge develops practical plans for the communication of his ideal to the underprivileged, but implicit in the first sentence of the above passage is the inherent danger of the retreat to which

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27. See J.-J. Rousseau. Emile, ou de l'éducation. (B.C).

28. Conciones ad Populum. p. 18. (Patton & Mann. p. 39).



I have drawn attention, that the new ideal of person-to-person relationship and tolerance has to be taught as much as 'the mask of Humanity' and is as detached from persons and practicality. This becomes clear when, after distinguishing the third class of Democrat as comprising those who want to be equal with those above them in status but want to keep the poor underneath - a category into which, perhaps, Southey was seen to fall<sup>29</sup> - Coleridge then describes the characteristics of the true Democrat.

Coleridge's enthusiasm runs away with him and he falls into the trap that he had earlier exposed:

We turn with pleasure to the contemplation of that small but glorious band, whom we may truly distinguish by the name of thinking and disinterested Patriots. These are the men who have encouraged the sympathetic passions till they have become irresistible habits, and made their duty a necessary part of their self-interest, by the long continued cultivation of that moral taste which derives our most exquisite pleasures from the contemplation of possible perfection, and proportionate pain from the perception of existing depravation. Accustomed to regard all the affairs of man as a process, they never hurry and they never pause. Theirs is not that twilight of political knowledge which gives us just light enough to place one foot before the other; as they advance the scene still opens upon them, and they press right onward with a vast and various landscape of existence around them. Calmness and energy mark all their actions. Convinced that vice originates not in the man, but in the surrounding circumstances; not in the heart, but in the understanding; he is hopeless concerning no one - to correct a vice or generate a virtuous conduct he pollutes not his hands with the scourge of coercion; but by endeavouring to alter the circumstances would remove, or by strengthening the intellect, disarms, the temptation. The unhappy children of vice and folly, whose tempers are adverse to their own happiness as well as to the happiness of others, will at times awaken a natural pang; but he looks forward

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29. See note 25 above.

with gladdened heart to that glorious period when Justice shall have established the universal fraternity of Love. These soul-enobling views bestow the virtues which they anticipate. He whose mind is habitually imprest with them soars above the present state of humanity, and may be justly said to dwell in the presence of the Most High.<sup>30</sup>

Two major points of interest emerge from this passage. The first I have already suggested and that is that in describing the characteristics of the true Democrats, Coleridge isolates for praise a group of people that constitutes an elite and a state of mind that can only be called 'visionary'. The detachment and impracticality that Coleridge had attacked in Brissot and the Girondists are favourably attached to the true Democrat, so much so that Coleridge can take delight in the prospect of soaring 'above the present state of humanity'. However, we are faced here with a seeming inconsistency only because we have not understood that the 'visionary' aspect of the true Democrat is seen by Coleridge as only one aspect, and this is the second point of major interest. The key to the distinctive feature of the true Democrat as envisaged by Coleridge is the sentence: 'Calmness and energy mark all their actions'. Energy is gradually taken by Coleridge, especially through contact with Thelwall, to be synonymous with 'being'. Also through contact with Thelwall, this concept of being comes into contact with physiological theory through such related designations as 'vital energy', 'animal vitality', and 'animal magnetism'.<sup>31</sup> The question which is now to concern Coleridge most forcibly, both abstractly and personally, is how, on the one hand, the calm contemplation of right ends can be indulged without the loss of energy, and, on the other, how energetic activity can be achieved without losing the consciousness of its aims and purposes. To

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30. Conciones ad Populum. pp. 20-21. (Patton & Mann. p. 40).

31. See Part II. Chapters 5 and 9.

put the matter personally, Coleridge wanted to be a speculator and an activist. He idealised the conjunction of the two in his picture of the true Democrat, but much of his thinking from this point onwards revolves around the fear that the two may be mutually exclusive.

Coleridge returns to the problem of communication. He comments:

That general Illumination should precede Revolution, is a truth as obvious, as that the Vessel should be cleansed before we fill it with a pure Liquor. But the mode of diffusing it is not discoverable with equal facility. We certainly should never attempt to make Proselytes by appeals to the selfish feelings - and consequently, should plead for the Oppressed, not to them. The Author of an essay on political Justice considers private Societies as the sphere of real utility - that (each one illuminating those immediately beneath him), Truth by a gradual descent may at last reach the lowest order. But this is rather plausible than just or practicable. Society as at present constituted does not resemble a chain that ascends in a continuity of Links.<sup>32</sup>

Godwin's solution is not satisfactory,<sup>33</sup> and Coleridge goes on to claim that the best method of communication is to go among the poor like the Methodists.<sup>34</sup> Religion is the most efficient way of communicating a sense of duty to the lower classes. In an ideal world, domestic affection would stimulate correct attitudes, but, in reality, many family responsibilities are so burdensome amongst the poor that true feelings become distorted and can only be resurrected by reference to a future ideal beyond ordinary experience. The language of the following passage is Paleyan, which indicates that Coleridge is hovering on the brink of contradiction:

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32. Conciones ad Populum. p. 25. (Patton & Mann. p. 43).

33. See W. Godwin (B.C). Bk. IV. Chapter II. Section III. Of Political Associations. pp. 205-219. for the discussion of this issue.

34. See Conciones ad Populum. p. 26. (Patton & Mann. p. 43).

Domestic affections depend on association. We love an object if, as often as we see or recollect it, an agreeable sensation arises in our minds. But alas! how should he glow with the charities of Father and Husband, who gaining scarcely more, than his own necessities demand, must have been accustomed to regard his wife and children, not as the Soothers of finished labour, but as rivals for the insufficient meal! In a man so circumstanced the Tyranny of the Present can be overpowered only by the tenfold mightiness of the Future. Religion will cheer his gloom with her promises, and by habituating his mind to anticipate an infinitely great Revolution hereafter, may prepare it even for the sudden reception of a less degree of amelioration in this World.<sup>35</sup>

Coleridge is unhappy with the situation of the poor family, but he places greater faith than before in the potentiality for goodness of the healthy family. He now regards under-valuation of the family as the first step away from particular, personal feeling towards the abyss of abstraction. In the following passage in which Coleridge is moving towards the concluding advice of his lecture, he tries to tie up some of the loose threads of his thoughts. He insists that fixed principles are necessary, but he is anxious to argue that these principles must be the precursors of action and not static conceptions acting as detached arbiters of behaviour. Indeed, principles should not even be the precursors of action but should be participants in it undergoing constant reformulation. Coleridge is concerned to avoid a duality of calmness against energy, wisdom against ardour. Action consolidates the principles which underlie further action. Even mistaken action is better than no action at all, since a mistake may lead to active wisdom whereas a position which eschews action will be valueless even if it is wise. For Coleridge, a lack of concern for immediate family through a concern for general benevolence is indicative of a stagnant wisdom that has

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35. Conciones ad Populum. p. 28. (Patton & Mann. p. 45).

become cut off from the roots of human feeling. Coleridge proclaims:

But if we hope to instruct others, we should familiarize our own minds to some fixed and determinate principles of action. The World is a vast labyrinth, in which almost every one is running a different way, and almost every one manifesting hatred to those who do not run the same way. A few indeed stand motionless, and not seeking to lead themselves or others out of the maze laugh at the failures of their brethren. Yet with little reason: for more grossly than the most bewildered wanderer does he err, who never aims to go right. It is more honourable to the Head, as well as to the Heart, to be misled by our eagerness in the pursuit of Truth, than to be safe from blundering by contempt of it. The happiness of Mankind is the end of Virtue, and Truth is the Knowledge of the means; which he will never seriously attempt to discover, who has not habitually interested himself in the welfare of others. The searcher after Truth must love and be beloved; for general Benevolence is a necessary motive to constancy of pursuit; and this general Benevolence is begotten and rendered permanent by social and domestic affections. Let us beware of that proud Philosophy, which affects to inculcate Philanthropy while it denounces every home-born feeling, by which it is produced and nurtured. The paternal and filial duties discipline the Heart and prepare it for the love of all Mankind. The intensity of private attachments encourages, not prevents, universal Benevolence. The nearer we approach to the Sun, the more intense his heat: yet what corner of the system does he not cheer and vivify?<sup>36</sup>

Some of the complexity of Coleridge's position can be gathered from the difference of emphasis between two of his final exhortations. Towards the end of the lecture he says:

The Man who would find Truth, must likewise seek it with an humble and simple Heart, otherwise he will be precipitant and overlook it; or he will be prejudiced, and refuse to see it. To emancipate itself from the Tyranny of Association, is the most arduous effort

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36. Conciones ad Populum. pp. 28-30. (Patton & Mann. pp.45-46).



of the mind, particularly in Religious and Political disquisitions. The asserter of the system has associated with it the preservation of Order, and public Virtue; the oppugner Imposture, and Wars, and Rapine. Hence, when they dispute, each trembles at the consequences of the other's opinions instead of attending to his train of arguments. Of this however we may be certain, whether we be Christians or Infidels, Aristocrats or Republicans, that our minds are in a state unsusceptible of Knowledge, when we feel an eagerness to detect the Falsehood of an Adversary's reasonings, not a sincere wish to discover if there be Truth in them; - when we examine an argument in order that we may answer it, instead of answering because we have examined it.<sup>37</sup>

Here Coleridge is drawing attention to the difficulty of having a tolerant, feeling-ful relationship with other people on account of the distorting and distancing effect of rationally held opinions. It is this emphasis on the purity of being before words and before behaviour that seems to be the basis for the developments in Coleridge's thinking which take him beyond the defence of toleration. By contrast, the final words of the lecture seem to advocate the new emphasis by recourse to old terminology. Coleridge says:

For this "subdued sobriety" of temper a practical faith in the doctrine of philosophical necessity seems the only preparative. That vice is the effect of error and the offspring of surrounding circumstances, the object therefore of condolence not of anger, is a proposition easily understood, and as easily demonstrated. But to make it spread from the understanding to the affections, to call it into action, not only in the great exertions of Patriotism, but in the daily and hourly occurrences of social life, requires the most watchful attentions of the most energetic mind. It is not enough that we have once swallowed these Truths - we must feed on them, as insects on a leaf, till the whole heart be coloured by

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37. Conciones ad Populum. p. 30. (Patton & Mann. p. 47).



their qualities, and shew its food in every the minutest fibre.

Finally, in the words of an Apostle, Watch ye! Stand fast in the principles of which ye have been convinced! Quit yourselves like Men! Be strong! Yet let all things be done in the spirit of Love.<sup>38</sup>

Coleridge again shows his anxiety that principles should be applied. The quotation from the Apostle shows Coleridge's concern for the conjunction of feeling and principle in action. However, he here retains aspects of the necessarian view which justify tolerance on the grounds that all men are externally determined, whereas we have seen that Coleridge was really grappling with tolerance as a positive expression of the relation of persons to persons. It is interesting that Coleridge uses an organic image<sup>39</sup> to describe the process of transformation that he had originally held, from principle to confirmed feeling, at the time when he was on the verge of recognising feeling itself, not as a faculty of being, but somehow as the organic essence of being.

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38. Conciones ad Populum. p. 34. (Patton & Mann. p. 49).

39. Coleridge uses the same image in a letter written at the height of his Pantisocratic thinking in October, 1794 (See Griggs. 65. p. 115). This supports my feeling that the final passage of the lecture covers up new insights with old language.

## CHAPTER III

1795: The Theological Lectures

Coleridge's mention of the value of Christianity in transforming the condition of the poor and uneducated at the end of A Moral and Political Lecture<sup>1</sup> was not at all casual. The Political Lectures of 1795 were followed by the Theological Lectures.<sup>2</sup> The lectures probably formed the basis for many of the sermons that Coleridge gave on The Watchman tour early in 1796, sermons which he described as being 'preciously peppered with Politics'.<sup>3</sup>

The interest of the lectures lies in the way in which Coleridge relates 'philosophical' and 'historical' arguments. Coleridge's inability to be accurately historical in his 'historical' arguments, or to understand problems in past history as different from problems in the present, has two significant implications. The first is related to the role assigned to theological knowledge or speculation in the 'Political Lectures'. Coleridge refuses to accept the historical life of Christ as more than an exemplary moral life. The life of Christ illustrates the potential existence of every human who establishes a relationship with God. The achievement of Christ did nothing to alter the need for every individual in the present to seek to gain communion with God. The kind of knowledge of God that Coleridge wanted to obtain in order to regulate his actions was not provided without individual effort, nor was it gained by speculation alone. Coleridge's attitude to the historical Christ complicated the problem of the

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1. See Part II. Chapter 2. (34)n.

2. For details of the dates of the lectures, see Patton & Mann. pp. xxxv-xxxvii.

3. See Griggs. 98. p. 176.

relation between thought and action. Secondly, however, Coleridge saw human history as the product of the Divine will, with the result that he investigated the dispensations of Moses and Christ as evidences of God's developing plan for the transformation of human society. This position should have involved an assessment of the wisdom of God in adjusting his revelations to suit the needs of man at different times, but Coleridge was unable to sustain this relative judgement. Consequently, Coleridge saw the past devices employed by God as still apt in the present for different psychological needs, and in seeing God as a social planner with humanitarian ideals, Coleridge unconsciously identified himself with the Creator. In the 'Theological Lectures', Coleridge's unconscious and familiar sense of identity with God's predicament runs alongside his explicit sense of the difficulty of the unaided progress of the individual towards a relationship with God. The important feature of these lectures is the combination which they contain of an implicit one-ness with God and the beginnings of what is later to become an elaborate theory describing the way in which one-ness may, with difficulty, be achieved. The lectures illustrate both Coleridge's unconscious logical deduction of identity with God and also his rational attempt to describe a necessary experiential approach towards identity.

The main line of Coleridge's 'philosophical' argument is found in the first lecture which is primarily concerned with the origin of evil. Coleridge's first assertion is that it is absurd not to acknowledge the necessity of a First Cause. He then answers two atheistic objections - the first,<sup>4</sup> that the idea of God as First Cause must imply contradictory attitudes with regard to materialism and immaterialism, and the second,<sup>5</sup>

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4. See MS. pp. 14-15. (Patton & Mann. pp. 96-97).

5. See MS. pp. 17-18. (Patton & Mann. pp. 100-103).

that the phenomena of Nature are explicable without reference to a Deity. Coleridge makes the important distinction between the existence and the essence of God. It is this distinction which separates Coleridge from pantheism. God's existence can be deduced from natural phenomena, but these phenomena are completely distinct from God's being.

Coleridge places the emphasis upon a form of intuition rather than deduction since he wishes to ensure that the being of God is beyond rational comprehension. Coleridge retains this emphasis when he treats the problem of evil. Coleridge admits that this problem might cause difficulty, but he argues that the tendency of the natural world is always to good, and therefore he claims that that to which the world tends manifests the character of the creator. Evil cannot and strictly does not exist. If the tendency is deliberate, however, why could not good have been bestowed immediately?

The way in which Coleridge answers this question suggests the background influence of Milton as much here as in the Political Lectures.<sup>6</sup> Coleridge argues that virtue gained through experience is qualitatively superior to virtue which is bestowed.<sup>7</sup> Hence God is mindful of man's pleasure in

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6. K. Coburn suggests that Coleridge was reading Toland's edition of Milton's Prose, Amsterdam, 1698, during 1795. See Note-books. Vol.I. Note 39. For references to Milton in the Note-books, see Note-books. Vol.I. Notes 106-110; 113-115; 118-119, (these last two referring to Areopagitica - see note (7) below).

7. Compare, for instance, the Miltonic attitude succinctly expressed in Areopagitica. See Milton's Prose Writings. int. K.M.Burton. London. 1958. p. 158:

"Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary. That virtue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank virtue, not a pure; her whiteness is but an excremental whiteness".

wishing to let man attain wisdom by overcoming error. The very existence of error is thus an indication of God's wise benevolence, and he is to be admired for it, not blamed. The evil which exists is subsumed under God's superior purpose. Accepting the existence of this qualified evil, the problem, for God and man, is to overcome error. The natural state is clearly not effectively self-evident. Reasoning is not sufficient to effect the change from misunderstanding to understanding.<sup>8</sup> It is at this point that Coleridge begins to fuse the abstract 'philosophical' arguments that have preceded with an account of God's action in history, an account which itself, significantly, employs language that had already been applied in the Political Lectures to take adjustment of the Pantisocratic ideal to suit a morbid society. Coleridge writes:

We may safely therefore conclude that the existence of moral evil does not impeach the divine power or benevolence. But by the effect of Error the World may be so sunk as to resist all the impressions of natural Wisdom. Would you employ Reasoning? Where are the Reasoners? Would you employ Reasoning? Where are the minds susceptible of it? There is a state of Depravity from which it seems impossible to recall mankind except by impressing on them worthy notions of Supreme Being, and other hopes & other fears than what visible objects supply. But unsusceptible of the effects of Reasoning Understanding so depraved will yield only to the overwhelming of supernatural Intervention. The wisest of the ancient Legislators had recourse to religious Imposture a fact which proves that they felt the necessity of the Revelation which they did not possess.<sup>9</sup>

Coleridge uses his distrust of the authority of reason that had resisted the persuasion of Southey as a means of interpreting the behaviour of God in

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8. In this situation, Priestley had reluctantly accepted the significance of Divine Revelation.

9. MS. pp. 23-24. (Patton & Mann. p. 111).

history. Reason had to be supported by the impression or the actuality of Revelation. It seems to be of little importance to Coleridge whether the Revelation is 'real'. For God to communicate his true self to the earlier ages of the world, he had to adopt an artificially authoritarian stance which would elicit a response because it was adapted to the needs of that point in history, just as parents have to use artificial means to educate their children in correct values. In both cases the harshness of legality is gradually removed by the power of association so that virtue is no longer induced, but assumes the status of naturalness. This is the form of Coleridge's psychological thought which, applied to human affairs alone, raised the problem of the establishment of criteria by which to assess the virtue of the precedent rational principles. In that context Coleridge had been forced to acknowledge the priority of the self, although he was unprepared to accept that the self might be innately virtuous.<sup>10</sup> However, in this historical context of God's dealings with man, God is himself the originator of the authoritarian stance so that its moral validity needs no questioning. This point is important since, as Coleridge's historical account loses its objectivity in the course of the Theological Lectures so the way becomes open for the authority of the unknowable God of history to be conferred upon the unknowable self at the base of the action of an individual. The passage in which this possibility begins to appear to be logically possible runs as follows:

The World has its Ages as well as Individuals. Its Infancy, and its Childhood and its Youth - By what do we most wisely educate our Children? Do we tell them of the beauty of Virtue chiefly? or do we tell them to do what is right for its own sake? a child would not understand, and therefore could not be influenced by

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10. See Part II. Chapter I.



them. It is with Virtue precisely as it is with money. Originally money is not valued but for its use in the procuring of some thing else, but in old age, many love and pursue that as an end which was at first only a means. - So Virtue is first practised for the pleasures that accompany or the rewards that follow it - and Vice avoided as hateful from the punishment attachment. But in length of time by the magic power of association we transfer our attachment from the Reward to the action rewarded and our fears and hatred from the Punishment to the Vice Punished. Hence it is that gross self-interest rises gradually into pure Benevolence, and Appetence of Pleasure into Love of Virtue.<sup>11</sup>

After this introduction to the transition from 'philosophy' to 'history', Coleridge begins the specific account of the Mosaic Dispensation which spans the first two lectures. In this account Coleridge has two dominant interests and intentions. First of all, Coleridge is concerned to demonstrate that the Mosaic Dispensation was a manifestation of the wisdom of God in that he revealed himself in a way which was so perfectly suited to the stage of man's development at the time of the revelation. Coleridge intends to present the Dispensation as a part of God's plan for human history. He says:

In order to take a fair survey of the Mosaic Dispensation we should consider its great Design - the preserving one people free from Idolatry in order that they might a safe Receptacle of the necessary precursive Evidences of Christianity!<sup>12</sup>

However, at the same time, Coleridge is interested in the Dispensation as a paradigm for the effective introduction of a genuinely republican society. In this regard, Pantisocracy is never far from Coleridge's thoughts. In the

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11. MS. pp. 26-27. (Patton & Mann. pp. 113-114).

12. MS. p. 28. (Patton & Mann. p. 116).

following passage he seems to be aware that his scheme might have been more fortunate if temporary laws equivalent to those of Moses had been established:

If any among us had the legislative Power committed to us for the next hundred years at the end of which we meant to introduce a pure Republic or perhaps an abolition of all individual Property - What a variety of laws should we be obliged to make useful only as tending to a better form of Things. We are not hastily to conclude an Ordinance or action trifling simply because we at first sight do not perceive its Uses - <sup>13</sup>

The first of Coleridge's interests is submerged by the second. He praises those features of social life under the rule of Moses which correspond with his ideals for a present-day republic. Coleridge's assessment is absolute, not relative, even though God's wisdom was ostensibly manifested by the applicability of his revelation to a particular time. Coleridge praises Jewish conditions in the following way:

The terms of this Law are beautiful and so replete with practical Wisdom and Benevolence that it would be almost criminal to leave any part of it unobserved. Liberty was proclaimed through the whole nation - the whole nation were informed by divine authority that it was unlawful to acknowledge any human superior. Every Hebrew was thus the Subject of God alone. Nor was an end proposed without means established - the Lands were restored. Property is Power and equal Property equal Power. A Poor Man is necessarily more or less a Slave. Poverty is the Death of public Freedom - it virtually enslaves individuals, and generates these Vices, which make necessary a dangerous concentration of power in the executive branch. If we except the Spartan, the Jewish has been the only Republic that can consistently boast of Liberty and Equality. Another effect of the general Restitution was that Error while it was thus prevented from becoming subversive of the state,

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13. MS. p. 29. (Patton & Mann. p. 116).

ceased likewise to be necessarily ruinous to the Individual.<sup>14</sup> Coleridge commends the wisdom of the historical laws of Moses, and the concomitant institutions which he planned. The strength of them was that both laws and institutions were wholly designed to maintain the absoluteness of each individual in society before the absolute God. The abolition of private property had been one of the main emphases of the Pantisocratic scheme, but Coleridge had wished to manipulate the environment without any enactment of laws.<sup>15</sup> As a model, Coleridge here seems to be admitting that the dispensation of Moses valuably illustrates a combination of wisdom and practicality. In his praise of Moses, Coleridge often steps outside the historical perspective. When he reaches the precept of Mosaic Law that no land should be sold, Coleridge generalises the point in such a way that he can be seen to be discussing an abstract, timeless relationship between God, Man, and the Soil:

There is nothing more pernicious than the notion that anyone possesses an absolute right to the Soil, which he appreciates - to the system of accumulation which flows from this supposed right we are indebted for nine-tenths of our Vices and Miseries. The Land is no ones - the Produce belongs equally to all, who contribute their due proportion of Labour. Nature seems to say to us, I have invited you to sojourn with me awhile - I have prepared you a beautiful Feast, but he is ungrateful and a thief who takes what he cannot use and hides what his Brethren want.<sup>16</sup>

It is not just this underlying symbolic awareness that distorts the historical objectivity of Coleridge's account. He also explicitly compares

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14. MS. pp. 39-41. (Patton & Mann. pp. 125-126).

15. Coleridge does not explicitly say that there should be no laws in the Pantisocracy, but in his positive plans, such as they are, there is not a mention of the formulation of a legal code.

16. MS. pp. 41-42. (Patton & Mann. pp. 127-128).

conditions under Moses with the condition of contemporary England. Coleridge praises the rotatory system of military service used by the Jews, mentions that it was also possible for a Jew to gain exemption from such service, and he contrasts these aspects with the English standing army and with the English press-gangs. Coleridge uses the example of the Mosaic situation as a direct means of attacking the English Government:

Moses, it should seem had received no divine Revelation of that great Mystery recently delivered by an English Statesman that Power was for the People not from the People, and that whether Murders and Famine are to be hazarded by a national War is a point more advantageously discussed by a few Place-men than by the unbribed many, unbribed, yet deeply interested.<sup>17</sup>

The effect of Coleridge's parallelism becomes significant when he discusses the role of religion under the Mosaic Dispensation:

To preserve one nation free from Idolatry in order that it might be a safe receptacle for the precursive Evidences of Christianity, was the principal design of the Mosaic Dispensation. Now what means could have been contrived better adapted for this purpose than by scattering one Tribe among all the rest, and making these depend for their Bread on the general Observance of the worship of the one true God.<sup>18</sup>

For Coleridge, the redeeming virtue of the Levites was that they had no property so that their intellectual authority was controlled by social dependence. Moses had recognised the need for religious instruction and practice amongst the people and he met that need without raising a priesthood which could form a capitalist elite. Coleridge compares the Levites with the modern clergy, and it is the result of such a comparison which

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17. MS. p. 46. (Patton & Mann. pp. 130-131).

18. MS. pp. 52-53. (Patton & Mann. p. 137).

must have disposed Coleridge to favour the activities of the Methodists in spite of the fact that he did not like their doctrinal position.<sup>19</sup>

Coleridge seems to accept that he had been mistaken in wishing to establish a refined religion in his Pantisocratic society without first introducing a system of acceptable religious half-truths which would finally tend towards the refinement that he had desired. Again, Coleridge shows himself to be learning from Moses the value of a preparatory disclosure of wisdom:

The Jews were established by Moses in a lovely Climate & that time a most fertile soil - the Land was equally divided - and the Toil necessary for the cultivation of it could not employ one fifth of their Time - but they were ignorant and could not therefore fill it up by literary occupation - they were fond of novelty - and would therefore have applied their idleness to the pursuit of the alluring Ceremonies of Idle Worship - Was it not then benevolent to prevent as much as possible the vice by removing the Temptation? By giving the Jews a splendid religious Establishment applied to the true God - and adopting the more innocent of the idolatrous ceremonies while those that led to Vices were severely interdicted? One of the chief and most influencing Principles of Idolatry was a Persuasion that the temporal Blessings of Life, Health, Length of Days, fruitful Seasons, Victory in Wars, and such advantages were to be expected and sought for as the Gifts of some inferior & subordinate Beings, who were supposed to be the Guardians of Mortal Men; this therefore independent of the arguments in the first Lecture was a sufficient Reason for promising all these as the effect of Obedience to the one true God - Whatever you would vainly expect from Astoreth, you may safely ask for from Jehovah. Again we know that our inward feelings are greatly increased and made more permanent as well as more vivid by frequent outward and visible expressions of them. Now every Age has its peculiar Language. And sacrifices unspotted and selected with laborious minuteness of examination was the ordinary Symbol (in the early ages)

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19. See Part II. Chapter 2. (34)n, and also Coleridge's comments on Methodism in The Watchman. No. I. (Patton. p. 13).



of dependence and gratitude and love. This Language therefore which the surrounding Nations impiously addressed to wood and stone, the Jews were ordered to pay to the unimagined Creator of all Things.<sup>20</sup>

The underlying comparison with the Pantisocratic dream is clear from the opening comments of the above passage.<sup>21</sup> Coleridge praises the pragmatic wisdom of Moses, in contrast with his own lack of wisdom, in that Moses recognised that religion was required and so transformed the erroneous religions of the surrounding nations into means of supporting the absoluteness of Jehovah. Worship of Jehovah is given an odd status in Coleridge's interpretation because he imposes the pattern of his secular ideal society upon the Jewish state. Coleridge explains that worship was encouraged for pragmatic reasons as a means of supporting the wise emphases of the Law, and in doing so he ignores his own insistence that the Law itself was Jehovah's revelation of himself through Moses. Worshipful behaviour is seen as a support for the way of life which will make a worshipful relation with Jehovah natural rather than enjoined. Coleridge's parallelism between Mosaic times and the present blinds him to the fact that his original justification of the Mosaic Law had been that it was adapted to a specific historical situation, which, in turn, leads him to confuse ends and means. Is religious worship to be encouraged simply to enforce the freedom and equality of society as an end, or is that 'end' really the means to an unenforced worshipful relationship with God which has as its necessary corollary the unenforced retention of a state of freedom and equality? The fundamental

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20. MS. pp. 58-60. (Patton & Mann. pp. 140-141).

21. Compare, particularly, the assessment of the apportioning of time and labour in the first sentence with a similar assessment made by Southey in a letter of August 22nd, 1794, to H. W. Bedford. Curry, K. New Letters of Robert Southey. (B.C). Vol. I. p. 70.



problem of Coleridge's discussion of the Mosaic Dispensation is that Coleridge is himself unable to distinguish between preparatory and complete worship of God since his conception of completion is conditioned by the experience which he feels that he has attained. Instead of rejecting a historical perspective totally in which case Coleridge would see Moses as a man under God manipulating other men by laws preparatory to them also being under God, Coleridge in fact seems to retain his perspective with relation to the person of Moses. Moses seems to be identified with his legislation and is thus seen in history as a preparatory individual rather than as an equal. The crucial point, indeed, is that whereas Coleridge's theory should lead him to identify himself with Moses, he does unconsciously perform the role of God within it. In accepting the value and wisdom of the social policies and techniques of Moses, Coleridge does seem to assume that Moses was capable of no other kind of social organisation, so that when Coleridge realises that the method of Moses has a place in the transformation of contemporary society, he places himself in the same relation to that society as he places God to human history. God chooses the technique of self-revelation that is suited to a particular time in history; Coleridge is able to choose from all the techniques that God has ever chosen for the purpose of transforming contemporary society since that society contains within itself all aspects of the human past and since Coleridge is one with God the First Cause by deduction from the effects of Divine activity within that past and also by deduction from the tendency of effects towards moral good in the natural world.

Coleridge's third lecture deals with the New Dispensation, and therefore we have to consider the status of Christ in Coleridge's theological position. At the beginning of the lecture, Coleridge adopts the pose of an ignorant individual who is confronted by accounts of the development of

the Christian sect. He places himself in the position of a contemplator of history which is comparable with the position he adopts in contemplating the natural world, and he finds confirmation of the Cause through the Effects in a similar way.<sup>22</sup>

Coleridge then demonstrates the authenticity of the New Testament, confuting, in so doing, arguments which attempted to prove that the Gospels were forgeries or to show that the contradictions in the Gospel accounts damage their authority. Coleridge then proceeds to defend prophecy. He writes:

Prophecies are necessary to Revealed Religion as perpetual Testimonies. At the first promulgation of a divine Mission Miracles are its best and only Tests. But the full force of such preter-natural Evidence can operate on the Eye-witnesses only. Their influence gradually decreases and becomes more and (more) faint and then the Accomplishment of predicted Events is substituted and discovers to us the truth of the Revealed Doctrines to us by a sufficient though not so overpowering a Light. So often when yet the Sun is high in heaven we may observe the Moon like a thin white cloud, pale faint and shadowy; but when the Sun sets, and the Night comes on, it acquires a gradual increase of Splendor till at length it reigns the presiding Luminary, and the Traveller journeys onward through the illumined Darkness unendangered and rejoicing.<sup>23</sup>

Here Coleridge explains the wide historical perspective that forms part of his whole attitude. History, in this view, is the gradual unfolding of the nature of God. The fulfilment of prophecies shows that the development of history is planned by God. Coleridge proceeds to describe the Stoic and the Epicurean philosophies and the status of philosophy in social life immediately before the time of Christ. As elsewhere, Coleridge is inclined

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22. See MS. pp. 77-78. (Patton & Mann. pp. 176-177).

23. MS. pp. 94-95. (Patton & Mann. pp. 151-152).

to describe the past with specific reference to the present, even though his intention is to show how necessary historically was the Dispensation of Christ, and how admirably suited it was to meet the needs of its context.

Speaking of the Stoics, Coleridge says:

The first of these believed a God indeed or at least seemed to believe one - but it was a material God, a principle of fire, to which they sometimes ascribed Intelligence, and sometimes obscurely denied it - and when they allowed an intelligent God, they by no means supposed him a first Cause, but the result of the organisation of the Universe, in the same manner as our minds have been supposed to be the effect of the peculiar organisation of our Bodies.<sup>24</sup>

Coleridge then goes on to describe the behaviour of the Stoics, and it becomes clear that Coleridge has the Godwinians in mind when he attacks Stoicism:

Suicide an action base and cowardly, and which above all other implies a mind totally dead to the happiness or misery of mankind they regarded as a Virtue of the highest Class - and so totally regardless were they of the domestic Affections, that one of their Sect the Censor Cato was accustomed to prostitute his Wife to any of his Friends, who desired it.<sup>25</sup>

Coleridge then describes the ends and the means of Christ's mission in the following way:

The end of the mission of Christ was to recall men to a practical belief in the power and perfection of Deity. In order to this it became necessary in all his actions the hand of God and not the authority of men should be evident. Hence it was ordered that he should be poor and uneducated, and consistently with the same place, the persons whom he chose for Partners and Companions in this work

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24. MS. p. 101. (Patton & Mann. p. 156).

25. MS. p. 102. (Patton & Mann. p. 157). Compare Coleridge on Godwinism in The Watchman. no. 3. See Part II. Chapter 4. (2) and (3).

were of the lowest Class as well as in Station as Abilities -  
 subdued to him by the evidence of his Miracles, yet ignorant of  
 his real Aim.<sup>26</sup>

Christ had to be wholly human so that his amazing actions could be seen to be the power of God working through man. Therefore Christ was poor and uneducated, and his followers were attracted to him, not by understanding but by the impression of his supernatural authority. Miraculous activity was, for Christ, a necessary imposture in the same way as the Divine Legation of Moses was a necessary imposture for God in order that he might reveal himself to man. Significantly, whereas God had used miraculous means of revelation to show himself to mankind through Moses, and Moses had employed the mystery of the worship of God in order to subdue men to his laws and thence to God, Coleridge represents Christ as using miraculous means to subdue men to his own person and thence, presumably, to God. Therefore, whilst Coleridge was able to accept the technique of Moses as a model and still place the person historically, this separation is not possible for Christ because in the case of Christ the technique is the person. It is this which is the central point about the new dispensation. Christ uses the techniques of the Mosaic dispensation in order to gain credibility for himself rather than for God. In Coleridge's interpretation the new dispensation is seen to comprise the wisdom of past revelations. Hence, the disciples are attracted to Christ in a child-like way, even though this is the dispensation which was intended to be a progression from the dispensation of Moses, and in order to show that God's techniques of self-revelation are cumulative, Coleridge passes over the fact that Christ eschewed miracles in his temptation in the wilderness. As was the case

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26. MS. p. 106. (Patton & Mann. pp. 160-161).

with Moses, so with Christ, Coleridge's historical account is distorted by his open or implied parallels with the present. We have already seen that Coleridge's account of Stoicism suggested a parallel with Godwinism, and, in his account of the life of Christ, Coleridge sees him as an opponent of Godwinian theory:

The most expansive Benevolence is th(at) effected and rendered permanent by social and domestic affections. We find in Jesus nothing of that Pride which affects to inculcate benevolence while it does away every home-born Feeling, by which it is produced and nurtured. The filial and paternal affections discipline the heart and prepare it for that blessed state of perfection in which all our Passions are to be absorbed in the Love of God. But if we love not our friends and Parents whom we have seen - how can we love our universal Friend and Almighty Parent whom we have not seen. Jesus was a Son, and he cast the Eye of Tenderness and careful Regard on his Mother Mary, even while agonising for the Cross - Jesus was a Friend, and he wept at the Tomb of Lazarus. Jesus was the friend of the whole human Race, yet he disguised not the national feelings, when he foresaw the particular distresses of his Countrymen.<sup>27</sup>

Having made this point about Christ most forcibly, the third lecture terminates uncertainly. Coleridge commends those aspects of Christ which seem to him to be relevant to the contemporary situation in England, especially Christ's emphasis on respect for the equality of persons rather than the Mosaic command for equality of property, but we remain uncertain of the status of Christ in relation to God and also in relation to succeeding generations of men. Coleridge's discussion in the next lecture of the manuscript entitled 'The Gnostic Heresies' removes much of the uncertainty.

Coleridge begins this lecture by summarising the views of the Gnostics:

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27. MS. p. 109. (Patton & Mann. pp. 162-163).

They held that matter was self-existent and its intractability the Cause of Evil. From God, or the supreme mind they supposed a derivation of Aeons or Intelligences by efflux or emanation. The genealogy or pedigrees of Intelligences male and female formed the greater part of their baseless System. These Intelligences, different in rank & dignity they supposed occasionally to assume the form of man in order to instruct the world. Such they imagined Christ to have been, and Simon Magus pretended to be one of these great Powers. Among the lowest of these Emanations they classed the human Soul, which they held to be imprisoned in the Body; and that these Souls were divided into Classes, the one good and the other bad, which difference they received from their nature and would retain to all Eternity.

Their opinions concerning Christ were these - the earlier Gnostics held the Christ to be a Spirit distinct from the man Jesus, entering into him at his Baptism, and quitting him before his Agony. To this Christ or superangelic Being they affirmed that the Man Jesus addressed himself on the Cross, when he exclaimed; My God! My God! why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them believed that even the Body which he assumed was not a body of flesh & Blood, but a phantom - that it was not born of Mary, but only exhibited by her - and in confirmation they feigned that Mary after the Delivery was found to be a Virgin. This was not however the universal Opinion. However they all of them entertained so mean an opinion of matter that they denied the Resurrection, affirming that the Body was indeed miraculously conveyed away from the Sepulchre but that the Christ who appeared to the disciples was a Spirit, who assumed the form of the crucified Jesus and impressed the idea of reality on their senses by a miracle.<sup>28</sup>

Coleridge has two central objections to the Gnostic position: he rejects their doctrine because it destroys the unity of God and, relatedly, because it allows for the presence of subordinate divine beings in the universe. Coleridge then proceeds to describe the Gnostic genealogy of Christ, but he

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28. MS. pp. 115-117. (Patton & Mann. pp. 197-198).



launches his main attack on the Gnostic Christology in an exposition of the first chapter of the Gospel of John which he treats as a deliberate response to the Gnostic threat. In using the Gospel to confute Gnosticism, Coleridge also imposes a Socinian emphasis on the writing of the Evangelist:

In contradiction to this St. John asserts, that in the beginning there was Intelligence, that this Intelligence was together with God, not an emanation from him, and that this Intelligence was God himself. All things were made by it and without this Intelligence was not anything made that was made, contradicting the Gnostic, who asserted, that there were many things in the constitution of the world, which could not have proceeded from Wisdom. The texts 'It was in the World and the World was made by it, and the World knew it not' and 'it was made Flesh and dwelt among us' imply - that the divine Intelligence never ceased to govern the world which it had created, though almost all mankind worshipped blind and senseless Deities; and that this same Intelligence was imparted by immediate Inspiration to the Man Jesus, who dwelt among us.

These passages were written to condemn the doctrine of the superangelic nature of Jesus - St. John here asserting that the same intelligent Energy which operated in Jesus had been in the World before his existence, teaching the Law to Moses and foreknowledge to the Prophets.<sup>29</sup>

Coleridge is careful to insist that Christ was the communicator of the divine energy, and in no way that energy itself.<sup>30</sup> Hence, for Coleridge, Christ has no authority other than as an example of the possibilities which are available to a human when he is informed with the divine intelligent energy.

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29. MS. pp. 119-120. (Patton & Mann. pp. 199-200).

30. For a consideration of Coleridge's debt to Priestley in his interpretation of the Gnostics, see Patton & Mann, particularly the notes to pp. 195-201. The most important influence was Priestley's An History of Early Opinions Concerning Jesus Christ. (4 vols. Birmingham. 1786.)

Christ has no historical status, but is a contemporary model. The possibility of being Christ-like depends on the present relationship of the self with the divine, and not at all with the attitude adopted towards Christ. In holding this position, Coleridge is forced to discuss the new Testament doctrine of atonement.<sup>31</sup> The problem of the historical status of Christ is the problem whether atonement with God was achieved once and for all in human history by Christ, or whether atonement must be achieved by all individuals for themselves, taking Christ's atonement simply as a model. In discussing this point, Coleridge obscures historical distinctions by arguing that the form of an action is unaffected by its content:

In order to understand the expressions in Scripture that relate to Atonement, we must examine the meaning and use of the Sacrifices and Victims. In a moral Sense a Sacrifice is nowhere considered by the Prophets as a cause operating on Deity, but merely as the means of meliorating our own Hearts. The feelings are increased and made permanent by the frequent outward expression of them. In the earlier ages Victims were the universal Language of Gratitude and Dependence - and their uses were precisely the same as those of Prayer and Thanksgiving in the present day - to warm and purify the weak Mortal not to work a change in the immutable God.<sup>32</sup>

Coleridge argues that prayer and thanksgiving have reference to the individual and induce an attitude towards God, in the same manner as did sacrifices in earlier ages. The relation between the individual and God is, therefore, no more directly personal in the new dispensation than in the Mosaic. The same gesture towards the absolute is differently expressed. Hence the apparent historical development is in reality non-existent, or at

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31. For Priestley's consideration of the doctrine of atonement, see The Scriptures Doctrine of Remission. passim. (B.B).

32. MS. pp. 121-122. (Patton & Mann. pp. 202-203).

any rate, is only evidenced by an insignificant alteration in the mode of addressing God. We can see here, too, a latent difficulty in the terms of Coleridge's thinking in the 'Political Lectures'. In that context, Coleridge had wanted to strike a balance between wisdom and ardour, between control that was rationally unimpeachable because pre-rational and a vitality of pure being. God was seen to be the repository of pre-rational wisdom, yet it now seems to become clear that the objectivity of the absolute God is uncertain. Coleridge's conviction is that gestures of worship towards God encourage a true experience of God which is the origin of wisdom, but it is clear that the gesture of worship is an ardent act which is itself not subject to moral assessment. The sacrifices of earlier times may have been inhumane, but they were the 'same' as prayer and thanksgiving. In the theological context it does not seem as if Coleridge's God is able to perform the task he had assigned him in the political context.

Contemplation of the pre-rational wisdom of the being of God does not control ardour of being, because contemplation is itself an ardent activity. The wisdom of God is not inherent in man: it has to be sought, and in seeking for it wisdom can have no control over the process. Coleridge cannot use religious wisdom as a means of controlling political enthusiasm, because religious wisdom is itself the product of religious enthusiasm, and both enthusiasms are the gestures of the a-moral ardour of being. By denying that atonement with God has been achieved in history by Christ and asserting that it must be achieved by the incentive of each individual being, Coleridge shuts out the possibility that religious belief might offer wisdom in a way which would make it unique.<sup>33</sup> In the Political Lectures

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33. We shall return briefly to this dilemma when Coleridge becomes interested in the writings of 17th Century English Divines. See Part II. Chapter 8.

Coleridge had segregated wisdom and ardour as two distinct categories which he hoped would inter-act - wisdom was found in God, and ardour manifested itself in political behaviour. This segregation could not neatly be preserved because Coleridge could not adopt the position that wisdom might be received from God rather than found in Him. Hence, although Coleridge could not accept that virtue or wisdom might be existent in the being of the pure self, he equally could not accept that they might be received from the being of the pure God unless the individual established a relationship which would enable him to be a recipient. Certainly the grace of God would flow abundantly through the individual who was in communion with God, but Coleridge's attitude to the atonement indicates that he believed that the necessary relationship with God had not been vicariously achieved by Christ for the whole of mankind. Personal wisdom could only be achieved, strengthened by divine wisdom, through an ardent act of the individual being directed towards God. Yet the human understanding intervened on two counts, imposing error. First of all, rational misunderstanding corrupted the sanctity of the self with the result that ardent activity was predisposed to error, and, secondly, rational misunderstanding obscured the Cause behind the Effects, with the result that, were not the origin of activity already corrupt its misdirection would also be inevitable.

Coleridge does seem to accept that the rigorously personal relationship between man and God that he advocates for which Christ is the model is also somehow the result of Christ's historical achievement. Historically Christ did achieve a figurative atonement which made it possible for people thereafter to achieve their own atonement. Just as the function of Moses in history had been to introduce laws which would render themselves obsolete, so the function of Christ was to use Mosaic techniques to introduce himself and then to render himself obsolete also. Christ created the conditions for

his own acceptance Mosaically, and, by a cumulative process, it was now the responsibility of each individual person to use the techniques of Moses and Christ as they were suitable in order to create the conditions for the unity of self and God. The historical function of Christ, for Coleridge, was, therefore, to destroy history or, rather, to focus the whole of history in the present. This seems to be the sense of the following passage where Coleridge makes a distinction between a 'moral' and a 'ceremonial' interpretation of atonement, and where this latter phrase clearly indicates a symbolic understanding of 'history' that also suggests that the 'historical' perspective' which we have discussed and from which Coleridge often diverges is overtly acknowledged to be a mental construct as lacking in tangibility as the moral world from which Coleridge excludes the possibility of moral evil. Coleridge writes:

Wherever therefore, whether in the Prophets or in St. Paul the Messiah is represented as having sacrificed himself for us it must be understood - as a necessary means relative to man not a motive influencing the Almighty. To awaken Gratitude, to confirm Purity, to evidence sincerity the pious Jew for himself offered a part of his property, the first fruits of his Flock - to effect the same ends in others Christ offered himself, i.e. he evidenced his sincerity by voluntarily submitting to a cruel death, in order that he might confirm the Faith or awaken the Gratitude of Men. Such is the moral sense of Atonement in **Scriptures**. There is likewise a ceremonial Sense. Both among the Jews and Gentiles no one was allowed to make prayer and thanksgiving in the temple until a sacrifice had been offered. Our Saviour who exposed himself to Death in the promulgation of that spiritual Law, which doing away all rites and ceremonies gave to us the Liberty of worshipping God in all times and places, may be figuratively yet truly styled a universal Sacrifice. Such seems the fair interpretation of the Scriptural Passages that relate the Doctrine of Atonement.<sup>34</sup>

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34. MS. pp. 122-123. (Patton & Mann. pp. 203-204).

With the casual, but significant, phrase 'figuratively yet truly', indicating a submergence of objective factuality in mental figuration, Coleridge terminates his discussion of atonement. The position he has adopted in this discussion comes into close relation with the 'philosophical' discussion of evil in the first lecture when Coleridge turns his attention next to the issue of Redemption. Coleridge's introduction of this problem suggests that he does not really regard redemption as a valid issue separate from atonement. The separation of the two implies a false division of God's Being from God's Justice.<sup>35</sup> Man will be redeemed, for Coleridge, not by accepting that evil must be punished in order to satisfy God's desire for justice, but by recognising, through atonement, that evil is an error which will be seen to fade away when God's being is truly experienced. Since, as we have seen, ardent behaviour may be a means of achieving atonement even if the behaviour is immoral, it is the very behaviour which orthodox Christians would regard as being in need of redemption that Coleridge would regard as being an indirect means to its achievement. This is not to say that Coleridge countenanced the idea of immorality, for that clearly would have been out of character, but it is to suggest that his theory was antinomian in tendency since it showed no concern for the 'morality' or 'immorality' of acts which were the necessary preludes to unity with God.

The remainder of the manuscript of the Theological Lectures contains two sermons and several fragments. These often re-work material found in the lectures proper, but the re-working is interesting because it shows conclusively that Coleridge kaleidoscopes his 'historical' insights so that he ceases to distinguish between moments of time and distinguishes instead

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35. Coleridge attacks the 'legalism' of Bishop Butler (see MS. p. 124. (Patton & Mann. pp. 204-205).) and then he moves into an attack of orthodox Christian 'mystification' (see MS. pp. 127-128. (Patton & Mann. pp. 207-208).)



between conditions which foster different psychological states. The first of the two sermons is on Equality, Inequality, and the ends of Government. The following passage again makes the point which had been made in the third lecture, that Christ used miraculous means with his disciples in order to gain acceptance. However, Coleridge's expression of the point in this instance brings out the parallel between the mission of Christ and that of the true democrat against both the extreme revolutionaries and the elitist systematizers:

Jesus Christ therefore commanded his disciples to preserve a strict equality - and enforced his command by the only thing capable of giving it effect. He proved to them the certainty of an Hereafter and by the vastness of the Future diminished the Tyranny of the Present. If not with hereditary faith but from the effect of our examination and reflection we are really convinced of a state after Death, then and then only will self-interest be wedded to Virtue - Universal Equality is the object of the Mess[iah's] mission not to be procured by the tumultuous uprising of an indignant multitude but this final result of an unresisting yet deeply principled Minority, which gradually absorbing kindred minds shall at last become the whole. To appreciate justly the value of this Panacea, we should behold the dreadful effects of the disease which it removes.<sup>36</sup>

Coleridge then gives an account of the origin of inequality in the emergence of landed property. Coleridge's explanation is at first simply economic. He attributes the loss of equality to the development of manufacturers which led to the emergence of cities, both of which were progressive factors in the disruption of the previous state of society which had not valued property solely because it was a pastoral and nomadic state:

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36. MS. pp. 140-141. (Patton & Mann. pp. 218-219).

In the early ages of the World the right of landed Property must have been none or transient - a man was proprietor of the Land only while his Flocks were feeding on it. The weapons necessary for hunting and the Utensils for domestic accommodation, introduced the separate arts of manufacturers and the Necessity of Barter, but the Occupations of the Manufacturer ill accorded with the wandering Life of the Shepherd - towns and Cities were soon built - these stationary settlements must necessarily have given an additional Value to the Lands in their vicinity, and introduced the pursuits of Agriculture - these introduced the right of landed property, and made it appear consistent with the prevailing Ideas of Justice.<sup>37</sup>

This is an 'historical' account unaffected by any moral judgement except that the historical progress produces economic forces which gradually destroy a situation of virtuous equality. We must recall that it was the object of Coleridge's account of the rise of inequality to show the value of the Messianic mission in working towards the restoration of equality. Coleridge's move from the past to the present tense in the previous passage made it unclear whether he regarded the Messianic mission as completed or in the process of fulfilment.<sup>38</sup> A little later in the same sermon Coleridge explains how commerce stimulates a series of artificial wants, and in this explanation Town and Country become the correlatives of alienation from and unity with God as states of mind:

The smoaks that rise from our crowded Towns hide from us the face of Heaven. In the country, the Love and Power of the great Invisible are everywhere perspicuous, and by degrees we become partakers of that which we are accustomed to contemplate. The Beautiful and the Good are miniaturized on the Heart of the Contemplater as the surrounding Landscape on a Convex Mirror.

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37. MS. pp. 141-142. (Patton & Mann. p. 219).

38. See the last sentence of (36).

But in Cities God is everywhere removed from our Sight and Man obtruded upon us - not Man, the work of God, but the debased offspring of Luxury and Want. At every step some Instance of bloated Depravity or squallid wretchedness meets us till at last we have doubts of providential Benevolence - and selfish Man accuses God for Miseries, which, if he had been employing himself as God and Nature ordained, he would not have been present to behold.<sup>39</sup>

Although Coleridge makes no explicit connection, the ideas of Town and Country cannot remain a-moral in the economic, historical interpretation, nor can their historical connotations be ignored in an assessment of the moral implications of present forms of social life. The ability to see the Cause clearly in the Effects is associated with feelings for the natural beauty of the countryside and is also identified with the early ages of man when the manufacturers had not developed which necessitated cities. Since this latter development in history becomes identified with two forms of social existence in the present, and these two forms are seen in moral terms with regard to a relation with God, it follows that God's gradual transformation of mankind so as completely to reveal himself in history can be achieved by each individual's internal transformation of himself. In this context, discussing what should be the attitude of the Christian to property and commerce, Coleridge interestingly interprets a passage from the Gospel of Luke:

And in Luke the 20th 21.22. they asked Jesus: "Is it lawful for us to give Tribute unto Caesar or no? And he said unto them. Shew me a penny whose Image and Superscription hath it? They answered and said Caesars And he said unto them - render unto Caesar the Things that are Caesars, and unto God the things that are Gods" A wise Sentence - That we use money is a proof that

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39. MS. pp. 147-148. (Patton & Mann. pp. 224-225.)

we possess individual property, and Commerce and Manufactures - and while these evils continue, your own vices will make a government necessary - and it is fit that you maintain that government. Emperor and King are but the lord Lieutenants of conquered Souls - secondaries and vicegerents who govern not with their own right but with power delegated to them by our Avarice and Appetites! Let us exert over our own hearts a virtuous despotism, and lead our own Passions in triumph, and then we shall want neither Monarch nor General. If we would have no Nero without, we must place a Caesar within us - and that Caesar must be religion!<sup>40</sup>

Religion must be placed within. It is almost as if Coleridge is implying that it was the achievement of Christ in history that allowed God's plan for history to develop in such a way that present man, in history, can have a relationship with God which is outside history because completely internalised. The religion which we must carry within ourselves must have, as content, God's dealings with man in history, but the purpose of that content is no longer to affect social life but to be the means of affecting a change in the self by providing the materials for the individual to re-live in himself the transformation of history that culminates in himself. It becomes clear that the initiative has passed from God to man in the task of revealing the true nature of God. In the last sermon the process by which the historical becomes internalised and equated with the self in its relation with the absolute is finally complete. Coleridge begins the sermon with a description of the feelings of perplexity concerning immortality held by most individuals. Coleridge continues in the following manner, and the whole passage must be quoted with its numerous echoes of statements in the lectures so as to show how Coleridge makes all cohere

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40. MS. pp. 153-154. (Patton & Mann. pp. 228-229).

in the individual self:

These feelings the hand of our universal Parent seems to have worked up into our constitution - at least we are so framed and placed in each circumstance that every contemplative mind necessarily acquires them. And from these natural longings after Immortality Man has been justly characterized a Religious Animal. The knowledge of a Deity was probably given to him at his creation. But independently of this the Similitude of the works of Nature to his own works and at the same time their infinite superiority would lead him by the most simple analogy to the belief of an intelligent and powerful Cause. Observing every where proofs of design he would gradually form a faith, that God or Nature had done nothing without design - and therefore that ardent desire of a future state, which Nature had planted in his breast, would seem to him to prove the Truth of it. In the pastoral state where the motives to evil were few and the imagination of men strong and vivid, these probabilities however slight in their fabrication would be adequate to all the then uses of Religious Influence. But when Towns and Cities were built, and the accumulative system had introduced more enormous Inequality with its accompanying Vices and Miseries then the Depravity of the Heart spread a darkness over the understanding, and the Fears and the Appetites of mankind distorted the simple faith of Nature into the grossest and most malignant Superstition. Reasoning from ourselves up to Deity we even attribute to him our own feelings. In rural scenes, Love and Power are everywhere conspicuous and by degrees we become partakers of that which we are accustomed to contemplate. The Beautiful and the Good of Creation are miniaturized on our Hearts, as the surrounding Landscape on a convex mirror. But in Cities the sights of Misery constantly obstructing will insinuate doubts of providential benevolence, and they who from infancy have been taught to look up with fear and veneration to weak and wicked men, because they (are) great and wealthy, will find a diminished difficulty in believing the Deity to be capricious or malignant. The uncorrupted Shepherd's Belief of God originated in the incessant perception of his benevolence - the Religion of the succeeding Generation in Terror and the Hopes of averting supposed malignity. Thus wretchedness and Tyranny assisted to corrupt

Religion, and corrupted Religion aids and confirms Tyranny and Wretchedness. There is a state of depravity from which it is impossible to recall the human heart except by impressing on it worthy notions of the Supreme Being and other wishes and other fears than what visible objects supply. But unsusceptible of the effects of Philosophical Reasoning the Heart so depraved will yield only to the overwhelming Influence of Miracles. The wisest of the ancient Legislators had recourse to religious Imposture, a fact which shews the necessity of a Revelation. This Revelation or reteaching of the Religion of Nature, we believe the Almighty to have vouchsafed in the teaching of Jesus, whose example the Text exhorts us to imitate - and whose character is itself a miracle demonstrative of the Truth of his Religion.<sup>41</sup>

Coleridge's argument begins by claiming that in earlier times the deduction of the existence of God from the design of the effects in the universe was adequate for the requirements of men. Coleridge then reproduces his description of the rise of cities as an economic, historical phenomenon obscuring God from men, although even here he confuses his argument by describing the process of obscuration in personal terms as a darkening of the understanding. The shift away from the historical perspective is then confirmed by Coleridge's move to the present tense as he describes the uplifting effect of the natural scenes of the countryside and the depraving effect of the urban life. Having idealised the life in the presence of nature for the present, Coleridge then transposes this ideal back again into the past when he talks of the uncorrupted Shepherd who, historically, became depraved on losing contact with natural scenes. At this point Coleridge reproduces the passage which he had used in the first lecture when he moved from his consideration of the origin of evil to his discussion of

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41. MS. pp. 156-159. (Patton & Mann. pp. 349-350).



the Mosaic Dispensation.<sup>42</sup> Then he had justified God's intervention in history on the psychological grounds that men, in a state of depravity, need the evidence of miracles. However, in this second use of the passage, Coleridge is introducing the new Dispensation, not the Mosaic, thus showing that Coleridge is not genuinely interested in analysing the two dispensations in relation to their historical contexts. Instead, the new term in the whole of the above passage is the one in which Coleridge claims that in the pastoral state of man the capacity of man to relate to God was high not just because the motives to evil were few, but also because the imagination of men was strong and vivid. Parts of the remaining fragments in the manuscript seem to suggest that Coleridge wishes to emphasize the role of imagination in the present in recreating internally those conditions no longer possible in actuality from which the Cause can be deduced. Whereas Coleridge praises the imagination of earlier ages in deducing the Cause from effects, he now seems to assign to the imagination a role which is one step further from reality. The imagination now has to create the phenomena which it then is to interpret. In two adjacent fragments, Coleridge tries to express his feelings:

But we were not made to find Happiness in the complete gratification of our bodily wants - the mind must enlarge the sphere of its activity, and busy itself in the acquisition of intellectual aliment. To develop the powers of the Creator is our proper employment - and to imitate Creativeness by combination our most exalted and self-satisfying Delight. But we are progressive and must not rest content with present Blessings. Our Almighty Parent hath therefore given to us Imagination that stimulates to the attainment of real excellence by the contemplation of splendid Possibilities, that still revivifies the dying motive

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42. See Part II. Chapter 3. (9)

within us, and fixing our eye on the glittering Summits that rise one above the other in Alpine endlessness still urges us up the ascent of Being, amusing the ruggedness of the road with the Beauty and grandeur of the ever-widening Prospect. Such and so noble are the ends for which this restless faculty was given us.- 43

or, as Coleridge re-phrases the second part of the above comment:

our eyes on the glittering Summits that rise one above the other in Alpine endlessness, still urges us up the ascent of Being, amusing the ruggedness of the road by the beauty and wonder of the ever widening Prospect. The noblest gift of Imagination is the power of discerning the Cause in the Effect a power which when employed on the works of the Creator elevates and by the variety of its pleasures almost monopolizes the Soul. We see our God every-where - the Universe in the most literal sense is his written language. If we could suppose an Atheist educated from Infancy in the total disbelief of an intelligent first Cause, all the magnificent work would be a blank and even to the Deist scarcely better - His God is but a philosophical Hypothesis - all that connects the Creator with his creatures he denies - his attributes are doubtful - and when he surveys the vast theatre of Life he considers himself as thrown on it by a careless Manager and snatched just as the Curtain was drawn - 44

These passages contain, alongside each other, two attitudes to Imagination. The second attitude confines imagination to the role assigned to it for the early ages of man. It was this imagination that enabled man to contemplate the first cause in Nature. This kind of imagination still exists and Coleridge seems tempted to rest content with the idealistic assumption that it is only this kind of imagination that is necessary in the present for God to be fully revealed. But at the same time Coleridge is aware that God has

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43. MS. pp. 170-171. (Patton & Mann. pp. 235-236. - given as part of the beginning of the Lecture on the Slave-Trade).

44. MS. p. 174. (Patton & Mann. pp. 338-339).

been devising more sophisticated techniques of self-revelation as the condition of man has become more complicated, to such an extent that man has now become as God in being the instigator of his own self-revelation. Unless Coleridge is to identify God with the self of man, Coleridge now has to elevate an aspect of the self, the Imagination, which imitates God in his creativeness by constructing an internal landscape of beauty from which the second kind of imagination can, in a conventional manner, deduce the existence of God for the benefit of the self. It is only by means of this elevated imagination that God can be given the 'objectivity', the sense of 'otherness', that the self needs in order to achieve its own purity without a kind of spiritual narcissism.<sup>45</sup>

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45. There is not much documentation which specifically relates to the development of Coleridge's doctrine of the Imagination. It seems to me that the doctrine does originate in a non-aesthetic context. This is the point that I emphasize on several occasions in Part IV. I am anxious to insist that Coleridge's use of 'imagination' at this time, and my isolation of two kinds of 'imagination' should not immediately be related to the 'primary' and 'secondary' imaginations of the Biographia Literaria. I later use the primary/secondary distinction since I find it formally accurate as an explanation of Coleridge's view, but this does not at all indicate that I am condoning an aesthetic interpretation of 'imagination'. This point would need to be debated at further length, however, since Coleridge was enthusiastic about Akenside's The Pleasures of Imagination at this time (see Part II. Chapter 2. (15)n), and was also reading Volume V of Edward Young's Works (B.C) which, however, does not contain his Conjectures on Original Composition which has such an influence in the development of the idea of creativity for German Romanticism. (For Young, see H.H.Clark (B.Dii); J.L.Kind (B.Dii); and W.Thomas (B.Di).)
- Until 1796, at the earliest, theories of art and creativity do not seem to have occupied Coleridge significantly if one is to judge by his letters and by the areas of his intellectual effort. For the development of the idea of imagination leading to Coleridge, see W.L.Kennedy (B.Di) and also E.L.Tuveson (B.Di).

## CHAPTER IV

'The Watchman' (March 1st - May 13th, 1796)

At the time of The Watchman,<sup>1</sup> Coleridge seemed to be endeavouring to oppose an abstracted belief in energy on two fronts. On the one hand, he advocates that God should be worshipped as pure being since, he argues, this can be the only form of worship which is not self-indulgent, and, on the other hand, he insists that the realities of poverty and sickness should be continually emphasized in order to prevent energy from being directed towards a complacent abstraction of general benevolence that is detached from the actual social facts. Coleridge wishes to attack abstraction from a position of religious and social positivism.

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1. Details concerning the conception of The Watchman enterprise can be found in Patton. pp. xxxii-xxxv. Apart from the practical considerations mentioned there, the production of a provincial journal does seem to follow logically from Coleridge's eulogy of the Press in The Plot Discovered. pp. 44-45. (Patton & Mann. p. 313). I am suggesting, here, that Coleridge's action in producing a newspaper is an attempt to put into practice the theoretical adaptation of Pantisocratic ideals to the actual social state that he adumbrated in the Political Lectures. He is attempting to be wise in his comments and also active in his presentation. This raises the problem of the relation between social concern and documentation and the writing of 'literature'. 1796 seems to me to be the crucial turning-point of Coleridge's early life in that his theory pushes him towards political activism at the same time as he wishes to retain a detached 'wisdom' and to write about his experience. In 1796 we see the attempt to be active thwarted by the stronger desire, instead, to describe the dilemmas of the activist, and this frustration leads to the 'retreat' to Nether Stowey at the end of the year and the inevitable renunciation of social involvement that follows. For further elaboration, this problem demands knowledge of Coleridge's contemporary concept of 'art' and an understanding of his motivation to produce 'literature' - to be a poet. Without this knowledge, this fascinating question cannot be resolved. For a pertinent discussion of this same issue, see R. Williams. Orwell. (B.Di), particularly Chapter 3. Being a Writer. I attempt to suggest further clues towards what might have been the essentially personal dilemma of Coleridge in this matter at the end of the present chapter, but, otherwise, I confine myself, somewhat reluctantly, to the more secure consideration of what Coleridge said about wisdom and activism, rather more than of what he did or failed to do.

The argument against abstraction based on the pure being of God is most clearly seen in Coleridge's attack on Godwinism in an article entitled "Modern Patriotism" in the third number of The Watchman. Coleridge addresses the putative patriot in the following manner:

You have studied Mr. Godwin's Essay on Political Justice; but to think filial affection folly, gratitude a crime, marriage injustice, and the promiscuous intercourse of the sexes right and wise, may class you among the despisers of vulgar prejudices, but cannot increase the probability that you are a PATRIOT. But you act up to your principles. - So much the worse! your principles are villainous ones! I would not entrust my wife or sister to you - Think you, I would entrust my country? The PATRIOT indulges himself in no comfort, which, if society were properly constituted, all men might not enjoy; but you get drunk on claret, and you frequent public dinners, where whole joints are stewed down into essences - and all for your country! You are a Gamester - you a Patriot! - A very poor man was lately hovering round a Butcher's shop - he wanted to buy a sheep's liver; but your footman in livery outbid him, and your spaniel had it! I doubt your Patriotism. You harangue against the Slave-Trade; you attribute the present scarcity to the war - yet you wear powder, and eat pies and sugar! Your patriotism and philanthropy cost you very little.<sup>2</sup>

Coleridge describes Godwin's principles as 'villainous'. He is now forcefully aware that abstract freedom between persons can evade the real problems of society. Those who are abstractly patriotic in their 'advanced' moral behaviour are avoiding the real issues of practical patriotism. There are two dangers under discussion. The first, which was recognised in the Political Lectures, is that energy of behaviour integrated with false principles is harmful; and the second, which is the distinctive fear of the early 1796 period, is that belief in energy itself, pure being, will result

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2. The Watchman. p. 73. (Patton. pp. 9899).



in excesses of lust and violence. The problem is that in order to cure the second danger, one seems driven into the first. To escape this impasse, a principle is required that will prevent excess of feeling, but which will also necessarily be a correct principle. The problem arises because Coleridge will not believe in innate virtue, the intrinsic goodness of being. Hence Coleridge finds that the following positive suggestions are necessary:

If I might presume so far, I would inform how you might become a Patriot. Your heart must believe, that the good of the whole is the greatest possible good of each individual: that therefore it is your duty to be just, because it is your interest. In the present state of society, taking away Hope and Fear, you cannot believe this - for it is not true; yet you cannot be a Patriot unless you do believe it. How shall we reconcile this apparent contradiction? You must give up your sensuality and your philosophy, the pimp of your sensuality; you must condescend to believe in a God, and in the existence of a Future State!<sup>3</sup>

Coleridge had first argued for belief in the existence of a Future State as if it were a necessary delusion for the purpose of transforming society in certain exceptional cases, but it becomes clear that since he cannot accept completely the virtue of the unconditioned self, he must wish it to be controlled by reference to an external unconditioned Good, which must be an absolute God without any rational accretions.<sup>4</sup> When Coleridge offers his

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3. The Watchman. pp. 73-74. (Patton. pp. 99-100).

4. This development of Coleridge's thinking, already implicit in the Theological Lectures, can be traced through his comments in letters at this time, notably in his qualified praise of Bishop Watson's reply to Tom Paine's The Age of Reason. (see Griggs. 116. p.197. a letter to Benjamin Flower of April 1, 1796). There is undoubtedly a move away from Priestleyan rationalism in the Spring of 1796 - see, for instance, Coleridge's reactions to his wife's 'mis-carriage' in a letter of March, 20th to John Edwards. (Griggs. 112. p. 193):

"Has not Dr. Priestley forgotten that Incomprehensibility is as necessary an attribute of the First Cause, as Love, or Power, or Intelligence?"

It seems likely that Coleridge approved of Watson's negative effort - his anti-rationalism, whilst, surely, still disapproving of his



positive suggestions for the creation of a modern patriot, he uses a dramatic and, from his point of view, an extremely pertinent image in describing Godwinism as the pimp of sensuality. Godwinian rationality does not stand over and against pure feeling ensuring that it does not become excessive for the simple reason that Godwinism is a human rationalisation that is the pandar to the very excess that it is designed to control. Coleridge has lost, in other words, his belief in the distinctive authority of reason. Reason had inherited Southey's authority in a subsidiary role,<sup>5</sup> but Coleridge now denies it that authority and claims that reason is the product of human feeling with the result that it cannot exert any control over feeling. The only possible control over the pure self is to be exerted by a pre-rational God. Coleridge does not offer belief in God as a temporary consolation of value in inducing acceptance of the adversities of the present state, although his language might still suggest this Paleyan interpretation, but instead he believes that a relationship of faith with an unconditioned Deity is the only way to effect the change from the actual present situation to the ideal one of heart-felt relations between persons. The crucial point is that belief in God becomes a necessary pre-requisite for the transformation of society, whereas, before, it had been regarded as a necessary fiction for the poor and uneducated who were unable to be altered because of their adverse social conditions and their lack of reasoning power.

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positive Trinitarianism. (For Watson, see R. Watson (B.C); and for Paine, see T. Paine (B.C); for another reply to Paine, see Priestley's A continuation of the Letters ... (B.B); Coleridge's attitude to Lessing at this time is obscure, but his veiled comment in the letter to Flower may imply that he felt able to accept Lessing's anti-rationalism without regarding himself as an 'infidel'. For Lessing, see G.E.Lessing (B.C), and also H.E.Allison (B.Di) and G.Pons (B.Di).

5. See Part II. Chapter 2. (17)ff.

In "Modern Patriotism" Coleridge strongly attacked Godwinism because, under the appearance of benevolence, it licensed self-indulgent behaviour. Coleridge recommends religious faith because it provides absolute obligation which must prevent sensuality, not rationalise it. However, if Coleridge is concerned, early in 1796, with excesses of sensuality, partly arising from the French atrocities of the time,<sup>6</sup> his attack on the problem from a point of view of social positivism leads to another danger, of which he is aware. This is the danger of abstract sensibility. Coleridge wishes to advocate concern for the immediate social problem, but he is afraid that this awareness might itself become systematised. He fears the cult of sensibility almost as much as he fears sensuality. It is in grappling with this problem that it becomes clear that Coleridge's theological speculation about God does not provide him with the kind of divine authority that he desires in the political context.

The essay "On the Slave Trade", is the re-working of a lecture that Coleridge had delivered in mid-1795,<sup>7</sup> and it confuses the issue slightly because, at that date, Coleridge had been anxious to counter the emphasis on the particular which ignored general benevolence. This was the emphasis which preceded his realisation, in "Modern Patriotism", that it was possible for a generalised system to lose contact with the particular. Coleridge begins the essay "On the Slave Trade" with a discussion of the faculty of imagination. Coleridge sees the imagination as the cause that leads men to propose to themselves those imaginary wants which are the origin of inequality in society. Equally, however, Coleridge sees that it is the

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6. The Terror was over, but for the political atmosphere of early 1796, see Patton. pp. xxxviii-xli.

7. For the original Lecture on the Slave Trade, see Patton & Mann. pp. 235-251.

function of the imagination to make 'abstract' sympathy as immediate as particular feelings between persons. In this second role, the imagination allows the individual to become as God in viewing all humanity as equal. Just as, in a theological context, the imagination allows God's dealings in history to be present to the individual, so, in a social context, the imagination allows the sufferings of men in all places, once known, to be present to the individual and to be felt with equal intensity. Ideally, the imagination breaks down barriers of Time and Space and allows the individual, like God, to be omniscient and omnisensitive.

The distinctive feature of the development of Coleridge's thinking in this direction in 1796 is, as we have seen, that he questions the authority of a general systematisation which is a human construct. Coleridge therefore raises the role of imagination so that it assimilates the being of God to the self rather than the fallible human consciousness of a general benevolence. Hence Coleridge is able to attack Godwinism and advocate a belief in the Being of God as the true source of benevolence. The result of this shift is that sensibility is not opposed to benevolence on the grounds that it springs from an emphasis on particular feeling without attempting to apply that feeling to a wider sphere, but instead on the grounds that sensibility is an emphasis on feeling which itself has become detached from the particular, has become an artificially stimulated emotion rather than one genuinely arising from the reality of social conditions.<sup>8</sup> Coleridge pushes religious positivism beyond self-indulgent human reason,

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8. In this context, Coleridge attacks Goethe's Werther in The Watchman. No. 4. p. 108. (Patton. p. 139), and also prefers the Isaac Jenkins of Thomas Beddoes to the Le Fèvre episode in Sterne's Tristram Shandy (see The Watchman. p. 268. Patton. p. 313). For the Beddoes tale, see T. Beddoes (B.C), and for the Le Fèvre episode, see L. Sterne, Tristram Shandy. ed. G. Saintsbury. London. 1965. B.VI. Chapters 6-13. pp. 305-318.

and he pushes social positivism beyond self-indulgent human feeling. On both extremes, Coleridge wishes to combine ardour with a consciousness of unconditioned being, either human or divine. On both extremes Coleridge's assumption is the same, that a relationship with God as He is or with men as they are will lead the individual self to act benevolently. The forms of the two positivisms are the same. Coleridge's separation of Theology and Politics, however reluctant it may have been previously, is now breaking down. An abstract, cognitive experience of God is no longer seen as a prerequisite for a true relationship of persons to persons since both activities are now seen as the product of an integration of wisdom and ardour in the being of the individual. In the Political Lectures, Coleridge reached the position where he wished to idealise 'wise ardor' - the conjunction of contemplation and action. Because they were political lectures, he was obviously primarily concerned with activity, and, in this context, wisdom was seen as a necessary restraining influence. There was the acceptance that a duality of wisdom and ardour was to be avoided, but Coleridge seemed to assume that wisdom and ardour were isolable characteristics which could inter-act. The emphasis of the Theological Lectures was, on the other hand, obviously placed on the achievement of wisdom in relation to the true God. Coleridge was, however, forced to conclude that activity is the means to wisdom. The ideal pattern envisaged in the Political Lectures cannot be realised, whilst Coleridge's speculation about an intelligent Deity does not itself procure divine intelligence. Such intelligence and wisdom can only be gained by taking decisive action. With Coleridge's emphasis on practicality in The Watchman there emerges a significant shift of emphasis. A relationship with God is not solely seen as a prerequisite of a relationship with other persons, but, instead, Coleridge begins to see the possibility that practical social

action is the prerequisite of knowledge of God. Certainly this second emphasis becomes as important as the first. This is again saying that true wisdom and valuable action are inter-active, but the main point is that in Coleridge's consideration of practical issues in The Watchman this insight gradually ceases to be a theoretical one reached from both theological and political thought, and instead becomes one which seems to have the possibility of practical application.<sup>9</sup>

On the same day that the sixth number of The Watchman appeared, Coleridge was writing to Thomas Poole:<sup>10</sup>

To tell you the truth, I do not think the Watchman will succeed - hitherto I have scarcely sold enough to pay the expenses - no wonder when I tell you, that on two hundred which Parsons in Paternoster Row sells weekly, he gains eight shillings more than I do -<sup>11</sup>

On May 5th, before the publication of the tenth number, Coleridge told Poole that he intended to end The Watchman at the twelfth number,<sup>12</sup> but the tenth, published on May 12th was the last. In spite of Coleridge's intention to unite wisdom and ardour in his newspaper, he had found, from the outset, that the pressure to remain abreast of immediate affairs as well as

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9. See note (1) above, In 'personal' terms, it is difficult to find any way of assessing whether Coleridge did in fact commit the precursive deed which he felt was theoretically necessary for the attainment of the 'wise' position that he rather assumed that he had reached.

10. For Thomas Poole, see Part II. Chapter 10 (5)n.

11. Griggs. 119. p. 202.

12. Griggs. 124. p. 208

the pressure to comment on them immediately, prohibited reflection. There seem to be two sources of Coleridge's anxiety during the period in which The Watchman was appearing. Firstly, he was harassed by the awareness that his wife was dependent on the profit he could gain from his own mental activity with the result that there was a domestic obligation to write quickly and produce work in quantity. Secondly, Coleridge was dismayed that he had to meet the demand for immediate news to such an extent that it became less possible for him to find time to write the accounts of the basic principles underlying behaviour which he believed to be necessary. Hence there was the dual pressure, not only to be productive but to be productive in a certain way. For his own welfare he needed to withdraw to the country and to gain subsistence by physical not mental exertion. There is evidence to suggest that Coleridge's desire to move to the country was stimulated by an interest in the possibility that 'nature' might be therapeutic and hence of positive social value.<sup>13</sup> There is a possibility that Coleridge saw his 'retreat' to the country-side not at all as an 'escape' but as a form of behaviour which was significant and active. His initial ideal may well

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13. This evidence would focus upon Coleridge's interest in Count Rumford's work (see The Watchman. No. 5) which caused him to wish to advocate the establishment of parks in cities (see Griggs. 123. p. 206. - written on April 30th, 1796 whilst The Watchman. No. 5 appeared on April 2nd). This attitude towards the therapeutic value of 'nature' in the midst of towns, of repose in 'nature' that was not total retreat or was a retreat only in the sense that the York Retreat was an asylum was in danger of becoming the kind of aristocratic cult described in D. Mornet. Le Sentiment de la Nature en France ... Deuxieme Partie. Chapitre Premier. Bergerades. p. 76. (B.Di). There is further evidence in Coleridge's undoubted knowledge of Edward Long Fox's asylum in Bristol (see An Answer to 'A Letter to Edward Long Fox, M.D.' (B.A); Patton & Mann. pp. 319-332) which would imply that Coleridge was more attracted by the medical rather than the aesthetic value of 'nature' - at least initially. For Count Rumford, see B.Thompson. (B.C) and E.Larsen (B.Di). For Edward Long Fox, see Patton & Mann. p. 321n and see also Griggs. p.254n. For the state of psychotherapy in the period, see K. Jones (B.Di) and R. Hunter & I. Macalpine. (B.Di).



have been corrupted as he lost sight of 'retreat' to 'nature' as a way of controlling his political behaviour and came to see it as a way of life itself. Another way of stating the case is to suggest that instead of seeing his 'retreat' as an enactment of the secondary imagination that enabled God to be deduced by the primary, he came to see it as a means of acquiring direct access to God through primary imagination. The move to Nether Stowey was, therefore, in the end, a retreat from mentalism to actuality<sup>14</sup> on Coleridge's own part, although he began to see that his own actual situation might then have mental significance for friends through whom he could be vicariously active in society and truly active in influencing their activism.

The narrative of the events in Coleridge's life for the remaining months of 1796 is the narrative of his attempts to find an adequate income by means which would not compromise the freedom of his mind to reflect.<sup>15</sup> Initially, Coleridge had several plans to become a tutor or to open a school, but, by the very close of the year he moved to Nether Stowey to live primitively near Thomas Poole. Coleridge was not a tutor at Nether Stowey but, for the early part of 1797, Charles Lloyd, a former pupil was a lodger in the small cottage. Lloyd was the son of Charles Lloyd, the Quaker, banker and philanthropist of Birmingham, and, partly on account of the

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14. Although, arguably, mentalism was a possible way of dealing with the growing problems of urban actuality whilst the retreat to 'actuality' was thoroughly reactionary and indicated the defeat of Coleridge's strong inclinations towards social involvement. For a stimulating account of the relation between 'mysticism' (which, perhaps, is where 'mentalism' leads) and social concern, see J. A. Passmore (B.Dii).

15. See discussions in the following letters: Griggs. 131; 135; 136; 138; 139; 140; 141; 142; 151; 157; 162; 163; 166; 169.

strict discipline of the family, the son was unstable and of a nervous disposition. At the time when Coleridge was seeking repose for himself from intense activity, he found himself involved partly in Quakerism which seemed to offer an atmosphere of passive serenity, and partly in evidence of instability arising from severe emotional strain. Observation of Lloyd's behaviour under strain would have caused Coleridge to take account of activity which was seemingly unconscious or irrational. Coleridge was forced to seek the advice of Thomas Beddoes in treating Lloyd. From this quarter, Coleridge was informed of the current theories in medicine of insanity, and, hence, inevitably, of theories concerning the nature of life and the unconscious. Meanwhile, throughout the period from the end of The Watchman to Coleridge's departure for Germany in 1798, he was in correspondence with two men who pushed his inclinations in opposite directions - John Thelwall and Charles Lamb. The former became almost a symbol of activism and the latter of passivity. This conflict is still the main theme of Coleridge's thinking in this period, but the scope of his thought is considerably broadened by the concatenation of the ideas and the persons of the four men now mentioned. The strands of Coleridge's thinking, or, at least, some of the possibilities which were manifested to him and impinged to varying degrees, can be examined by studying Coleridge's relationships with these four men during the period of almost two years from mid-1796 to mid-1798.

## CHAPTER V

John Thelwall<sup>1</sup>

Thelwall's ideas are interesting in relation to Coleridge for three main reasons. First of all, Thelwall is extremely interested in analysing relations between persons or creatures which are somehow sub-rational, but, secondly, he also retains the sense that social benevolence must be learned. On the one hand, Thelwall has a stronger inclination to trust natural affection than Coleridge, an inclination which leads him to follow up the subject as a matter of physiological enquiry,<sup>2</sup> and yet, on the other hand, Thelwall believes that the correct mode of social and political behaviour must be rationally deduced and cannot be arrived at by letting persons act instinctively. Thelwall tries to deduce a code of behaviour from his understanding of the laws of nature, whereas Coleridge would want to deduce the Being of God from those same natural laws. This difference becomes an important subject of contention between the two men.<sup>3</sup> The third interesting feature of Thelwall's ideas received most attention in his novel in three parts entitled The Peripatetic<sup>4</sup> and is related to the other two.

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1. For sources for Thelwall, see (B.C). See also C. Cestre (B.Di); Mrs. J. Thelwall (B.Di); E. Thompson (B.Di); and B.S.Allen. "Godwin's Influence upon John Thelwall". (B.Dii).
  2. In his essay on Animal Vitality which, unfortunately, is no longer extant. One can deduce his interests from those of the lecturers to whom he listened at Guy's Hospital, although the records of Guy's are not useful in locating precisely the contents of the lectures that he may have attended. (See Anon. (B.Di) for the Guy's records).
  3. For Coleridge's recognition of this fundamental difference, see Griggs. 133. p. 122.
  4. Published in London in 1793.

Thelwall was interested in modes of human therapy.<sup>5</sup> Beyond the period with which we are concerned, Thelwall directed his energies into elocution as a form of speech therapy, and in The Peripatetic he gradually unfolds, as plot, the sufferings of his old friend Belmour who now wanders around the countryside in melancholic despair, and much of the action of the work focuses upon the occasional attempts of the travellers to cure Belmour's depression and divert him from his intention to commit suicide. Thelwall is interested in the relation between calm and wild feelings, and he wants to examine whether depression can be diverted by reason or whether nature itself must effect a cure.

It is only possible here to make reference to the way in which Thelwall's The Peripatetic may have aroused Coleridge's interest in connections between medical and political theories. It is possible that Thelwall's interest in 'animal vitality' may have helped to bring home to Coleridge that his own theory of human feeling was a rationalisation of forces of human attraction which were ontological and not conceptual.<sup>6</sup> Certainly this is a realisation that was induced, as we shall see, by Coleridge's acquaintance with medical science through friendship with Thomas Beddoes. However, Coleridge's correspondence with Thelwall centred, at least initially, upon political issues, and in this sphere Thelwall's views, particularly with reference to what he called the 'prospective principle of virtue', stimulated Coleridge's thinking and impinged upon it to some degree.

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5. This is clearly related to the interest of Coleridge mentioned in Part II. Chapter 4. (12)n.

6. Thelwall's interests, in other words, may have helped to break down the impasse of intellectuality described with reference to Coleridge's feelings for Mary Evans and Sara Fricker. See Part II. Chapter I. (11)ff.

Thelwall reveals the essential aspects of his own political creed in praising the French Revolution in number VII of The Tribune. He writes:

That which I glory in, in the revolution of France is this, That it has been upheld and propagated as a principle of that revolution, that ancient abuses are not, by their antiquity, converted into virtues; that it has been affirmed and established that man has rights which no statutes or usages can take away; that intellectual beings are entitled to the use of their intellects; that the object of society is the promotion of the general happiness of mankind; that thought ought to be free, and that the propagation of thought is the duty of every individual; that one order of society has no right, how many years soever they have been guilty of the pillage, to plunder and oppress the other parts of the community, whose persons are entitled to equal respect, and whose exertions have been much more beneficial to mankind.<sup>7</sup>

There are three main emphases inherent in this political creed. The first two are complementary in that Thelwall wishes to ensure that the institutions of society do not impose prejudices either by the authority of precedent or of a present privileged status, and, at the same time, he wishes to ensure that the force of mind and feeling of individuals within society that enables them to enjoy institutional freedom is not enervated by any kind of mental oppression from objective reason. Although these two emphases become the same, Thelwall sees himself as fighting on two fronts, for the liberation of the individual and for the liberalising of social institutions. Thelwall's third main emphasis is that the end of liberation is the 'general happiness of mankind'.

It is in Thelwall's attacks on Burke<sup>8</sup> that his hostility to traditional political authority is most apparent. In his Sober Reflections

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7. The Tribune. Vol. I. pp. 155-156.

8. For Burke, see Part II. Chapter 2. (19)n.

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on the Seditious and inflammatory Letter of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke, to A Noble Lord, published in 1796, Thelwall writes:

I repeat it, therefore, I do not stand up as the advocate of hereditary distinctions, or hereditary honours. All honour, and all shame, are, in my calculation, merely personal. Goods and chattels may be heritable property; and in such a society as we are members of, I am convinced that it is necessary they should be so. But moral and intellectual distinctions, (the fountains of all real honour) are neither heritable nor transferable; nor is it in the power of human laws to make them such. They begin and they end with the immediate possessor.<sup>9</sup>

Thelwall's second major attack on Burke, this time a reply to the Letters on the Prospect of a Regicide Peace,<sup>10</sup> which he published, also in 1796, under the title The Rights of Nature, against the Usurpations of Establishments, shows more clearly the positive ideas which underlie his hostility to the authority of precedent. Against Burke, Thelwall writes:

The right of these establishments to originate could only arise from the nature and circumstances of man, for whom, and by whom, they originated. If it was right that they should originate by man, man had a right to judge of the propriety of their originating; and, consequently, of the propriety of the establishments themselves: and, if that propriety arose out of the nature and circumstances of man, his right to judge of their propriety necessarily included a right to judge of his own nature and circumstances, and to modify the establishments accordingly. The conclusion is --- that either the nature of man is changed (for his rights grow out of his nature, and without change of nature there can be no change of rights) or else he is still at liberty to judge of his own nature and circumstances, and to

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9. Sober Reflections. p. 44.

10. Published in London in 1796.

originate such establishments as that nature, and those circumstances require. In other words --- Establishments cannot decide upon First Principles; but First Principles must decide upon Establishments.<sup>11</sup>

In asserting so vehemently that rational investigation must be exercised in the present, Thelwall, however, is unconscious that, by implication, he is denying the continuity of human history, and also, with regard to the individual, a sense of permanent identity. The significance of Thelwall's position when he transfers his iconoclasm from the rejection of historical precedent to the rejection of retrospection for the individual is most important for it explains how Coleridge could see Thelwall as a symbol of activism. The seventh number of The Tribune is devoted to the publication of a lecture which Thelwall entitled "On the Moral and Political Influence of the Prospective Principle of Virtue". Thelwall begins the lecture by reiterating his belief in the value of reasoning in the present, but in this context Thelwall is most concerned with the exertion of individuals, which he considered to be the only security against institutional tyranny. Thelwall writes:

Let it be remembered, however, Citizens, that novelty is of itself no proof of falsehood, that the opinions of six moments and of six thousand years, if such an opinion should be found, stands precisely upon the same basis, the basis of reason and argument; and, therefore, must be brought to the same test of experimental investigation, or else must be permitted to fall at once, and be abandoned as unworthy our adoption.<sup>12</sup>

For the purposes of this argument Thelwall makes no distinction between

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11. The Rights of Nature. Letter II. First Principles: or, Elements of Natural and Social Rights. pp. 16-17.

12. The Tribune. Vol. I. p. 148.

energetic reasoning and energetic behaviour. He assumes that the rational recognition of a duty is automatically followed by its performance. Hence activity must be equally committed to the present. Thelwall elaborates:

If, Citizens, virtue consists in promoting the happiness of mankind - if virtue, in reality, means neither more nor less than intentionally doing that which is best for general happiness and welfare, it results, I conceive, as an inevitable consequence, that all virtue must be of an active, not of a passive nature; and, therefore, that it is the duty of every individual to keep his eye steadily fixed upon that which is before him, and to lose none of the powers and energies of intellect in unavailing glances upon what is past, and never can return.

Citizens, this argument will lead us to many conclusions hostile to the general sentiments of mankind. Superstition, with her hood and cowl, presents herself before us at every step, with her doctrines of repentance, contrition, retaliation, and retributive justice, and points us back again to the dark and gloomy paths of error, which we, and which others may have passed; and bids us, in sackcloth and ashes, consume our faculties in unavailing lamentations, which can never undo the acts that are past, but which have but too powerful an influence to unfit us for what is to come.<sup>13</sup>

As Thelwall boldly states elsewhere, in The Rights of Nature:

All retrospective principle is crime: and to its criminality adds folly.<sup>14</sup>

Errors are not to be mourned. Energy is to be re-directed on the basis of a new rational deduction of duty, regardless of the consequences of the previous false action. Thelwall concludes this passage with the following exhortation:

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13. The Tribune. Vol. I. pp. 149-150.

14. The Rights of Nature. Letter I. Introductory Remarks; on the Spirit and Temper of Burke's letters on the Prospect of a Regicide Peace. p. 36.

Citizens, whatever may have been errors, let us recollect, that there is a nobler path for man to tread. Whatever wrongs he may have committed, whatever errors he may have fallen into, while energy remains, there may be reparation to society. Virtue and beneficence are still attainable; and the same energies which, under the delusions of error, made him criminal, guided by the light of truth, might produce such qualities and such effects as would make full compensation to the world.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout his political lectures Thelwall makes the point that the rational activity that must be cultivated in the present is the analysis of the position of man in the universe. In the first political lecture, Thelwall uses the image of the chain of being to emphasize his point:

At any rate then, as we would wish to be peaceable and virtuous members of the community, it is necessary above all things that we inform our minds by diligent cultivation: that we enquire into the nature and obligations of our own existence - dive as far as our intellects will permit, into the discoverable laws of the universe, compare the different parts of the whole system, and endeavour to discover what link in this vast chain is filled by man - what are his duties, his powers, his capacities, how far he is improvable by knowledge and exertion, and what are the proper pursuits, in which, as the result of these premises, he is bound to engage.<sup>16</sup>

Thelwall argues that the result of such a rational analysis must be an acutely felt vision of the unity of the universe and of the interdependence of all created beings. He says of a person who has used his reason in this manner:

He looks in the face of his fellow creature; and he sees indeed a brother - or a part rather of his own existence; another self -

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15. The Tribune. Vol. I. p. 151. It becomes clear that, in The Peripatetic, Belmour's mistake causing his insanity was excessive 'retrospection'.

16. Political Lectures. (No. 1.) p. 10.

He contemplates in every individual the faculties of sufferance and of enjoyment, and feels one nerve of sympathy connecting him with the whole intellectual universe, and giving him an intimate share in all the blessings which he hopes, by his exertions, to impart to the human race.<sup>17</sup>

In the hands of Paley the argument from design became an instrument for advocating the conservation of the social status quo, but, at the end of his speech in the Copenhagen-fields, Thelwall's phrasing shows that in wishing to avoid conservatism he does invite the inhumaneness of an utilitarian assessment:

We wish for principles that will give to every man an honorary estimation, proportioned only to the purity and utility of his conduct; and which will, consequently, insure the felicity of mankind. Let us then proceed with regularity --- with one heart, one voice, one soul: as if we were, in reality, but one existence, and each particular individual felt the strong conviction, that we are but so many joints, members, and nerves of the same system, to promote the happiness, welfare, and glory of which is at once our desire and our interest.<sup>18</sup>

Thelwall's respect for other creatures seems to extend only to those others who are actively endeavouring to make themselves fit members of the whole. Wordsworth would have to defend *The Old Cumberland Beggar* as vigorously against Thelwall as against any other less sentimental utilitarian.<sup>19</sup>

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17. Political Lectures. (No. 1.) p. 11.

18. The Speech of John Thelwall ... Monday, October 26, 1795. p. 24.

19. I am thinking of The Old Cumberland Beggar, line 67:  
 "But deem not this Man useless. - ..." (see W. Wordsworth (B.C). p. 444).  
 On the other hand, Wordsworth's attitude in a later poem (Gipsies, 1807) is not unlike Thelwall's:  
 ... - oh, better wrong and strife  
 (By nature transient) than this torpid life;  
 Life which the very stars reprove  
 As on their silent tasks they move! (see W. Wordsworth. (B.C) p. 153).

Thelwall's vision of human activity becomes dangerously schematic. In The Tribune, number VII, Thelwall concludes his lecture in the following enthusiastic terms:

Be gone, ye idle, melancholy sensations; ye feelings that can produce no fruit. - I call upon Roman energy - I call upon Spartan fortitude, which characterised the pure and virtuous republicans of the ancient world; - upon these I call to steel my heart with firmness. Let me, so long as I exist, impart (such as it is) my advice, my little knowledge, my best assistance to my fellow citizens; and let me not, by unavailing regrets, and retrospective views, consume the energies to which I have no exclusive right - which are your's - which are the property of my country - of all mankind.

For I am not a solitary individual. I stand not upon a world where I behold no inhabitant but myself. I am but a part - a little, little member of the great animal of human society - a palpillary nerve upon one of the extremities! and I must do that duty to the whole, for which by my structure and organization I am adapted.<sup>20</sup>

In these sentiments we can see a foreshadowing of Social Darwinism, but, to use a phrase of Coleridge's, they indicate, for the 1790's, an 'ebullience of schematism' which was often the fatal tendency of the enthusiastic radicals.<sup>21</sup> In constructing an intellectual system which might control instinctive energy, Thelwall moves away from his awareness of the purity of human sympathy. Coleridge would have been interested in Thelwall's belief in activity, but it seems likely that he would have regarded Thelwall's system as an example of the kind of abstraction which he most specifically

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20. The Tribune. Vol. I. p. 163.

21. Or, at any rate, it was this that Coleridge considered to be their fatal tendency.



attacked in "Modern Patriotism" in The Watchman.<sup>22</sup> It was that very article which was the subject of early discussion between Coleridge and Thelwall.<sup>23</sup>

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22. See Part II. Chapter 4. (2) and (3).

23. See Griggs. 122. pp.204-205; and 127. p. 213. See also Thelwall's letter to Coleridge written between these two letters on May 10th, 1796. (A Letter to S. T. Coleridge. (B.C). The other point of contention in the early correspondence between the two men was connected with Thelwall's reaction to Coleridge's mention of him in the Political Lectures. (see Part II. Chapter 2. (13). which Thelwall felt was ambiguous.

## CHAPTER VI

The correspondence between Coleridge and Thelwall in late 1796

Through the summer of 1796 Coleridge was endeavouring to find a settled occupation for himself. First of all he accepted a post on the Morning Chronicle in London, and then, at the same time, he was offered a tutorship at Darley. Both possibilities faded, and it was then suggested by a Dr. Crompton that he should open a school in Derby. Whilst this plan was progressing, Coleridge met the Lloyd family at Moseley. Here, in late September, he heard the news that Sara had given birth to David Hartley Coleridge, and here also he learnt that the Derby plans had collapsed. Coleridge arranged to act as tutor to Charles Lloyd, and the two young men returned to Bristol immediately.<sup>1</sup> On arrival in Bristol Coleridge received a letter from Charles Lamb informing him that Mary Lamb had killed their mother.<sup>2</sup> The next day Coleridge wrote the letter of consolation which Lamb had requested and which he treasured always thereafter.<sup>3</sup> In the beginning of October, Coleridge wrote to Charles Lloyd, senior, to inform him that he intended to retire to the country for the good of his own health and also that of Lloyd's son.<sup>4</sup> From this point until the end of the year Coleridge was negotiating to find a cottage in the country, and, with the aid of Thomas Poole, this plan was realised at the very end of the year. Having withdrawn from London, Thelwall, too, was casting about for a settled occupation and situation, and, to judge by Coleridge's replies in the last few months of the

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1. For these events, see the letters mentioned in Part II. Chapter 4. (14)n.
  2. Corr. 8. pp. 39-41.
  3. Griggs. 143. pp. 238-239.
  4. Griggs. 144. pp. 240-241.

year,<sup>5</sup> was asking Coleridge's opinion of various projects and seeking the help of any contacts which Coleridge might be able to provide. We shall look more closely at the influence of Lamb and Lloyd, but these basic facts are necessary to explain Coleridge's shift towards a concern for religious consolation.

In a letter of November 13th, Coleridge firmly mentions the difference of opinion which divides himself from Thelwall. He writes:

We run on the same ground, but we drive different Horses.

I am daily more and more a religionist - you, of course, more & more otherwise.<sup>6</sup>

Coleridge was writing in reply to a request from Thelwall for assistance, and Coleridge makes practical comments on Thelwall's schemes. A more friendly tone enters this letter, and Coleridge presses Thelwall for information about himself. There is the slight sense that Coleridge is not simply concerned to advise Thelwall how to act, but is rather more deeply concerned to take Thelwall in hand so as to mould him into an ideal patriot. There is the impression that Coleridge is wanting to recommend a course of study to Thelwall which will temper his activity with wisdom. If Thelwall gained this impression himself, he certainly was not annoyed for he answered Coleridge's questions within a week, and asked Coleridge to reciprocate with a comparable self-portrait. Unfortunately, we do not have Thelwall's account of himself, but, to judge by his occasional comments in his lectures, he would **almost** certainly have emphasized that his knowledge of books, especially the Classics, was poor,<sup>7</sup> and it would also seem likely that he

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5. See Griggs. 153. p. 254; and 156. p. 258.

6. Griggs. 153. p. 253.

7. In The Natural and Constitutional Rights. p. 5, he typically described himself as 'a plain, unlearned man'.

would have presented a picture of himself as a restless man of action. It certainly seems feasible that it suited Coleridge's thinking at the time to see himself as the very reverse of Thelwall. Coleridge says of himself:

As to my shape, 'tis a good shape enough, if measured - but my gait is awkward, & the walk, & the Whole man indicates indolence capable of energies. I am, & ever have been, a great reader - & have read almost every thing - a library-cormorant - I am deep in all out of the way books, whether of the monkish times, or of the puritanical aera -<sup>8</sup>

Coleridge proceeds to describe some of his abstruse reading, and then he encloses a poem written on the birth of his son which poetically employs the platonif doctrine of Pre-existence.<sup>9</sup>

Coleridge's next letter to Thelwall, written on December 17th, continues to accentuate the difference between the active and the passive man.

Coleridge describes his plan to live in the country, and then continues:

Now in favor of this scheme I shall say nothing: for the more vehement my ratiocinations were previous to the experiment, the more ridiculous my failure would appear; and if the Scheme deserve the said ratiocination, I shall live down all your objections. I doubt not, that the time will come when all our Utilities will be directed in one simple path. That Time however is not come; and imperious circumstances point out to each one his particular Road. Much good may be done in all. I am not fit for public Life; yet the light shall stream to a far distance from the taper in my cottage window. Meantime, do you uplift the torch dreadlessly, and shew to mankind the face of that Idol, which they have worshipped in Darkness!<sup>10</sup>

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8. Griggs. 156. p. 260.

9. "...and Some have said  
We liv'd ere yet this fleshly robe we wore". (Griggs. 156. p. 261).

10. Griggs. 164. p. 277.

There then follows a long argument in which Coleridge defends the charge of anti-religious Bigotry which he had brought against Thelwall. Coleridge takes this opportunity to make a final private defence of Christianity, and, in doing so, he tries to modify Thelwall's confidence.

Coleridge replies to one of Thelwall's comments, that Christianity is a mean religion. Coleridge reduces Christianity to two heads of belief - that God is Omnipresent, and that future existence is real. Coleridge accepts that these tenets may not be sublime, but he goes on to argue that the language of Revelation and Hebrews is sublime, and that the imagery of Milton is superior to that of Homer and Virgil. After quoting Biblical passages to enforce his point, Coleridge then moves to an attack on Thelwall's alleged contempt for Old Age with its implication that Christian morals are only suitable for the senile and vicious.<sup>11</sup> Coleridge responds vigorously to what he takes to be Thelwall's meaning:

'Visions fit for Slobberers'. If infidelity do not lead to Sensuality, which in every case except your's I have observed it to do, it always takes away all respect for those who become unpleasant from the infirmities of Disease or decaying Nature. Exempli gratia - the Aged are 'Slobberers' - The only Vision, which Christianity holds forth, is indeed peculiarly adapted to these Slobberers - Yes! to these lonely & despised, and perishing SLOBBERERS it proclaims, that their 'Corruptible shall put on Incorruption, & their Mortal put on Immortality!

'Morals for the Magdalen & Botany Bay'. Now, Thelwall! I presume that to preach morals to the virtuous is not quite so requisite, as to preach them to the vicious. 'The Sick need a

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11. In a later manuscript note cited by Griggs. pp. 281-282, Thelwall claimed not to be able to understand the 'contempt' that was imputed to him, but there is sufficient evidence to suggest that he might have been contemptuous of useless old people (see Part II. Chapter 5. (19)n.).

Physician'. Are morals, which would make a Prostitute a Wife, & a Sister; which would restore her to inward peace & purity; are morals, which would make Drunkards sober, the ferocious benevolent, & Thieves honest, mean morals? Is it a despicable trait in our Religion, that it's professed object is 'to heal the broken-hearted, and give Wisdom to the Poor Man? - It preaches Repentance - what repentance? Tears, & Sorrow, & a repetition of the same crimes? - No. A 'Repentance unto good works' - a repentance that completely does away all superstitious terrors by teaching, that the Past is nothing in itself; that if the Mind is good, that it was bad, imports nothing.<sup>12</sup>

As Coleridge's argument moves towards consideration of repentance, he finds ground which might seem congenial to Thelwall. Coleridge is openly hostile to the kind of repentance which Thelwall might have regarded as retrospective. Coleridge's dislike of tears and sorrowful regret corresponds<sup>13</sup> with Thelwall's dislike of enervating remorse,<sup>14</sup> and, similarly, Coleridge wants to advocate a form of repentance which has the effect of erasing the past completely. Thelwall would have approved of this effect, but the point that Coleridge is trying to make is that the past can be erased if error is genuinely regretted in a positive fashion and not just self-indulgently. For Coleridge, the possibility of new action in the present is the effect of repentance for past error. Coleridge's principle of virtue is, in Thelwall's term, prospective, but it is prospective in two stages. In order to repent genuinely a person has to make an effort to act correctly, since, if he does not, the repentance is merely retrospective,

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12. Griggs. 164. pp. 281-282.

13. Coleridge's dislike here, which clearly is a representation of Thelwall's view of Christian repentance, is in harmony with his dislike of excessive 'sensibility'. (See Part II. Chapter 4. (8)n.).

14. See Part II. Chapter 5. (15).



but, when he has made this first gesture his new action cancels out the error of the past. Thelwall's theory, in contrast, attempts to see these two stages as one, both condensed into Coleridge's first stage. For Thelwall, it is the prior cancellation of past error that allows the individual to make the prospective gesture which is, for Coleridge, the sign of genuine repentance. Significantly, the area of debate here is the same as that regarding Redemption in Coleridge's Theological Lectures. The prior cancellation of error which Thelwall wants to assume stands in opposition to the achieved cancellation which Coleridge requires in exactly the same way as the orthodox doctrine of Christ's prior redemptive death stood in opposition to the individually achieved redemption advocated by Coleridge.<sup>15</sup> The main difference between the positions of Thelwall and Coleridge on this matter is that the latter would argue that in Thelwall's theory all actions always have an equal chance of being wise or grossly false, whereas his own theory should mean the continual improvement of action. Coleridge's first action alone has the arbitrariness which he would see in all Thelwall's actions.

Coleridge then proceeds to argue, against Thelwall, that Christianity is a religion suitable for Democrats. In the manner of the 'Theological Lectures' Coleridge shows how the behaviour that is required of a Christian is identical with that required of a Democrat, emphasizing, for the benefit of Thelwall, that Christianity teaches 'in the most explicit terms the rights of Man'.<sup>16</sup> Coleridge also emphasizes that the Christian is expected

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15. See Part II. Chapter 3. (35)f.

16. See Griggs. 164. p. 282. I think that this is the only time that Coleridge uses this expression, which indicates that he has understood Thelwall's position and is therefore arguing ad hominem.

to be prepared to suffer for what he believes, and he makes this point in language which recalls Thelwall's description of his own suffering in 'Poems written in close confinement'.<sup>17</sup> Coleridge obviously places this emphasis deliberately, and it becomes very clear that he is trying to refute Thelwall's contention that speculation is destructive of energy. Coleridge writes:

Here is truth in theory; and in practice a union of energetic action, and more energetic Suffering. For activity amuses; but he, who can endure calmly, must possess the seeds of true Greatness. For all his animal spirits will of necessity fail him; and he has only his Mind to trust to. - These doubtless are morals for all the Lovers of Mankind, who wish to act as well as speculate; and that you should allow this, and yet not three lines before call the same Morals mean, appears to me a gross self-contradiction, symptomatic of Bigotry.<sup>18</sup>

Coleridge's use of suffering here links, as we shall see, with the tranquillity experienced by Lamb and enjoined by Coleridge. In enduring suffering, physical animal spirits may fail, but a mental assurance can maintain energy in this situation. It begins to seem as if Coleridge is

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17. Coleridge writes (Griggs. 164. p. 282):

"... yet to hold the promulgation of Truth to be a Law above Law, and in the performance of this office to defy 'Wickedness in high places,' and cheerfully to endure ignominy, & wretchedness, & torments & death, rather than intermit the performance of it; yet while enduring ignominy, & wretchedness, & torments & death to feel nothing but sorrow, and pity, and love for those who inflicted them; wishing their Oppressors to be altogether such as they, 'excepting these bonds'. -"

In "Stanzas on Happiness" from Poems written in close confinement, Thelwall writes:

"What tho' Oppression's iron fang  
Arrest him, yet in youthful bloom?  
He owns perhaps one kindred pang; -  
And then - exulting! meets his doom"

18. Griggs. 164. p. 282.

now finding a distinct place for 'suffering' in the process of transformation from sin to redemption. It is this sense of a process of human transformation which Coleridge now wants to insist upon in contrast with Thelwall's view of a series of distinct, independent rational choices of action. Coleridge writes:

Christianity regards morality as a process - it finds a man vicious and unsusceptible of noble motives; & gradually leads him, at least, desires to lead him, to the height of disinterested Virtue - till in relation & proportion to his faculties & powers, he is perfect 'even as our Father in Heaven is perfect'. There is no resting-place for Morality. Now I will make one other appeal, and have done for ever with the subject. - There is a passage in Scripture which comprizes the whole process, & each component part, of Christian Morals. Previously, let me explain the word Faith - by Faith I understand, first, a deduction from experiments in favor of the existence of something not experienced, and secondly, the motives which attend such a deduction. Now motives being selfish are only the beginning & the foundation, necessary and of first-rate importance, yet made of vile materials, and hidden beneath the splendid Superstructure. -

'Now giving all diligence, add to your Faith Fortitude, and to Fortitude Knowledge, and to Knowledge Purity, and to Purity \*Patience, and to Patience \*\*\*Godliness, and to Godliness Brotherly-kindness, and to Brotherly-kindness Universal Love'.<sup>19</sup>

In order to define 'Patience' Coleridge adds a note referring Thelwall to a passage in his A Moral and Political Lecture where he has seen it as a characteristic of the 'true Democrat' that he should so combine wisdom with ardour that the urge for immediate action would be restrained by a wider vision.<sup>20</sup> Coleridge now calls this ability 'Patience' and notes that it

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19. Griggs. 164. p. 282.

20. See Conciones ad Populum. p. 20. (Patton & Mann. p. 12).  
See also Griggs p. 283n.

was this quality that Robespierre lacked.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Coleridge adds a note in definition of 'Godliness':

... the belief, the habitual, & efficient belief, that we are always in the presence of our universal Parent.<sup>22</sup>

In illustration of this sense of 'Godliness', Coleridge provides a translation of part of Voss's Luise.<sup>23</sup> However, Coleridge's continued elaboration of his meaning in the main text of the letter, shows that he pushes 'Godliness' beyond the definition that he has already given, to the point that his meaning becomes almost blasphemous.<sup>24</sup> Coleridge elaborates in the following way:

I hope, whatever you may think of Godliness, you will like the note on it. - I need not tell you, that Godliness is Godlike-ness, and is paraphrased by Peter - 'that ye may be partakers

21. The interpretation of the fate of Robespierre (see Griggs. 164. p. 283n) is an interesting pointer to divergences of moral theory amongst the English radicals of the 1790's. Coleridge believed that Robespierre was necessarily corrupted by choosing the wrong means to the right end, whereas, for instance, Southey felt that Robespierre had been corrupted by external conditions. For Southey's summary of these divergent views, see his letter to Horace Walpole Bedford, August 22nd, 1794. Curry, K. New Letters of Robert Southey. Vol. I. pp. 72-73.

22. Griggs. 164. p. 283n,

23. For early German influence in England and on Coleridge, see J. L. Haney (B.Di) and (B.Dii). In the same footnote to this letter, Coleridge also mentions Moses Mendelssohn. For Mendelssohn and his influence, see M. Simon (B.Di); A. D. Snyder (B.Dii); and G. J. Ten Hoor (B.Dii).

24. Corr. 9. pp. 49-50. See Part II. Chapter 8. (8).

of the divine nature'. - i.e. act from a love or order, happiness, & not from any self-respecting motive - from the excellency, into which you have exalted your nature, not from the keenness of mere prudence.<sup>25</sup>

By 'Godliness' Coleridge here means the process of becoming united with God - a state of being from which there follow attitudes to mankind and the universe which are those of God. When this 'Godlike-ness' occurs, love flows from the excellence of being, from transformed nature, not from rational prudence. In using the word 'prudence', Coleridge deliberately addresses himself to Thelwall for whom it was a favourite term for restraint.<sup>26</sup> For Thelwall, the impetus for human behaviour in the universe comes from a rational deduction of utility, whereas, for Coleridge, behaviour must be the natural result of a process which starts with rational deductions and questionable motives and is then transformed. As we shall see, Coleridge's view of possible one-ness with God is given substance, towards the end of 1796, by orthodox accounts from seventeenth century divines concerning the nature of contrition, and also by his experience, at first and at second hand, of human suffering.<sup>27</sup> The abstract view of the need for any action as a precursor of wise union with God which Coleridge reached in the Theological Lectures is given substance by the idea of Faith as a gesture and also of suffering as the result of an involuntary action. The voluntary action of uncertain motivation (Faith) and the involuntary action which is a-moral are both basic and inexplicable, and when Coleridge comes to examine the distinction between voluntary and involuntary through

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25. Griggs. 164. p. 284.

26. See, for instance, Thelwall's invocation to the 'guardian principle of PRUDENCE' in Political Lectures. (No. 1). p. 40.

27. See Part II. Chapter 7.

witnessing Lloyd's fits and somnambulism, the two types of inexplicables begin to seem the same.

Coleridge has now reached the climax of his answer to Thelwall. He repeats the quote from 2 Peter, and then concludes his case with the following personal remarks:

Putting Faith out of the Question, (which by the by is not mentioned as a virtue but as the leader to them) can you mention a virtue which is not here enjoined - & supposing the precepts embod(ied) in the practice of any one human being, would not Perfection be personified? - I write these things not with any expectation of making you a Christian - I shou(l)d smile) at my own folly, if I conceived it even in a friendly day-dream. But (I do wish to see a progression in your moral character, & I hope to see it - for while you so frequently appeal to the passions of Terror, & Ill nature & Disgust, in your popular writings, I must be blind not to perceive that you present in your daily & hourly practice the feelings of universal Love). 'The ardor of undisciplined Benevolence seduces us into malignity' - And while you accustom yourself to speak so contemptuously of Doctrines you do not accede to, and Persons with whom you do not accord, I must doubt whether even your brotherly-kindness might not be made more perfect. That is surely fit for a man which his mind after sincere examination approves, which animates his conduct, soothes his sorrows, & heightens his Pleasures. Every good & earnest Christian declares that all this is true of the visions (as you please to style them, God knows why) of Christianity - Every earnest Christian therefore is on a level with slobberers. Do not charge me with dwelling on one expression - these expressions are always indicative of the habit of feeling. - You possess fortitude, and purity, & a large portion of brotherly-kindness & universal Love - drink with unquenchable thirst of the two latter virtues, an(d) acquire patience; and then, Thelwall! should your System be true, all that can be said, is that (if both our Systems should be found to increase our own & our fellow-crea(tures') happiness) - Here lie or did lie the all of John Thelwall and S. T. Coleridge - they



were both humane, & happy, but the former was the more knowing:  
 & if my System should prove true, we, I doubt not, shall both meet  
 in the kingdom of Heav(en), and I with transport in my eye shall  
 say - 'I told you so, my dear fellow'. But seriously, the faulty  
 habit of feeling, which I have endeavoured to point out in you, I  
 have detected in at least as great degree in my practice & am  
 struggling to subdue it. - 28

The potential ground for the elision of faith and involuntary action which is a-moral is seen in Coleridge's assertion that faith is not itself a virtue, but rather a neutral, precursive force. In these concluding remarks there is also further demonstration that Coleridge attempts to answer Thelwall from an understanding of the latter's position. Coleridge argues that a Christian belief which is demonstrably efficacious for man must be, in Thelwall's term, 'fit',<sup>29</sup> and, therefore, since it has a place in a general utilitarian pattern of happiness it should be energetically cultivated. Again, whilst Coleridge is prepared to present himself as a passive person, he is not prepared to let Christianity be stigmatised as visionary or in any way uncondusive to activity. In spite of Coleridge's increased emphasis upon 'Godliness', he is still predominantly interested in purity of being as a means to social welfare. Coleridge is not at all attempting to dissuade Thelwall from activity, but, on the contrary, to prepare him better for it. There is distinctly the sense that, having renounced the attempt to fuse speculation and political activity in his own person, to unite wisdom and political ardour, Coleridge now wishes to portray himself as a man of wisdom who can act as mentor to a man who is fundamentally a man of action. It is this role of mentor that Coleridge gradually assumes during 1796 and which, perhaps, he came to regard as his most useful and realistic active function.

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28. Griggs. 164. pp. 284-285.

29. See Part II. Chapter 5. (19), for Thelwall's sense of fitness or adaptation.

This role emerges most strongly in relation to the two younger men of his acquaintance, Charles Lamb and Charles Lloyd.

## CHAPTER VII

Evidences of Instability: Charles Lamb and Charles Lloyd, 1796-7

The first extant letter of Lamb<sup>1</sup> to Coleridge is dated May 27th, 1796, although it is very likely that they had been in correspondence before that time. They certainly had met since the time that they left Christ's Hospital, and it was with Lamb that Coleridge had conversed at the end of 1794 in London when he had been censured by Southey for his reluctance to return to Bristol to fulfil his duty with regard to Sara Fricker.<sup>2</sup> It would seem from Lamb's letter of May 27th that he and Coleridge had been in similarly depressed spirits at that time for much the same reason. Lamb recalls that period eighteen months earlier and his enquiry after Coleridge's fortunes since that time indicates that there had been no contact between the two men in 1795. It seems possible that the publication of The Watchman brought news of Coleridge to Lamb's attention again, for he says that he is 'glad to hear' that Coleridge is employed in producing "Evidences of Religion".<sup>3</sup> Lamb then continues:

Coleridge, I know not what suffering scenes you have gone through at Bristol. My life has been somewhat diversified of late. The six weeks that finished last year and began this, your very humble servant spent very agreeably in a madhouse, at Hoxton. I am got somewhat rational now, and don't bite any one. But mad I was; and many a vagary my imagination played with me, enough to make a volume, if all were told.<sup>4</sup>

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1. For sources for Lamb, see (B.C). See also G. Whalley. "Coleridge's Debt to Charles Lamb". (B.Dii). See also J. S. Iseman (B.Di) and B. Lake (B.Di).
  2. See Part II. Chapter 1.
  3. This is E.V.Lucas's explanation of the revived correspondence.
  4. Corr. 1. p.2.

Shortly afterwards, Lamb hints at the cause of his madness. He writes:

Coleridge, it may convince you of my regards for you when I tell you my head ran on you in my madness, as much almost as on another person, who I am inclined to think was the more immediate cause of my temporary frenzy.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, Lamb found himself in a real life situation not unlike that of Coleridge in 1794 in relation to Mary Evans.<sup>6</sup> The acuteness of Coleridge's feeling at that time had probably diminished considerably by 1796, but Lamb continues to remind Coleridge of the occasion of their meeting. Writing in June, Lamb recalls:

You came to town, and I saw you at a time when your heart was yet bleeding with recent wounds. Like yourself, I was sore galled with disappointed hope. You had

--- "many an holy lay

That, mourning, soothed the mourner on his way".  
I had ears of sympathy to drink them in, and they yet vibrate pleasant on the sense. When I read in your little volume, your nineteenth effusion, or the twenty-eighth or twenty-ninth, or what you call the "Sigh", I think I hear you again. I image to myself the little smoky room at the Salutation and Cat, where we have sat together through the winter nights, beguiling the cares of life with Poesy. When you left London I felt a dismal void in my heart.<sup>7</sup>

The strength of Lamb's remembrance of this incident is significant. He seems to have been a timid and lonely person, and the impression emerges that he deliberately cultivated memories so that they might function as present consolations. In the above passage, Lamb uses phrases which suggest that

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5. Corr. 1. p. 3.

6. E. V. Lucas argues that 'another person' was a girl called Ann Simmons. (See The Letters of Charles Lamb. ed. E. V. Lucas. (B.C). Vol.I. p. 4).

7. Corr. 3. pp. 17-18.

he consciously re-creates the past so that the image which he conjures once again has a real sensational effect. Lamb's imagination is employed in bringing past persons into the present,<sup>8</sup> and Coleridge becomes concerned, later, to transfer this creative activity so that God rather than men may become vitally present to Lamb.

We have seen that Lamb experienced some form of madness himself at the end of 1795, and he also seems to have been very interested in the lunacy of William Cowper,<sup>9</sup> but his acquaintance with madness was to be more terrible than anything he had so far witnessed or experienced, and on this occasion he was not to be consoled simply by the poetic diversions provided by a friend. In a letter of September 27th, Lamb broke his solemn news to Coleridge:

My dearest Friend, - White, or some of my friends, or the public papers, by this time may have informed you of the terrible calamities that have fallen on our family. I will only give you the outlines: - My poor dear, dearest sister, in a fit of insanity, has been the death of her own mother. I was at hand only time enough to snatch the knife out of her grasp. She is at present in a madhouse, from whence I fear she must be moved to an hospital. God has preserved to me my senses: I eat, and drink, and sleep, and have my judgment, I believe, very sound. My poor father was slightly wounded, and I am left to take care of him and my aunt. Mr. Norris, of the Bluecoat School, has been very kind to us, and we have no other friend; but thank God, I am very calm and composed, and able to do the best that remains to do. Write as religious a letter as possible, but no mention of what is gone

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8. The memory of his grandmother seems to have functioned for Lamb in the same sort of way. See his early poem "The Grandame" (Complete Works. p. 688)

9. See Lamb's lines "To the Poet Cowper" enclosed in Corr. 7. p. 37.

and done with. With me "the former things are passed away",  
and I have something more to do than to feel.

God Almighty have us all in His keeping!<sup>10</sup>

As we have observed, Coleridge received Lamb's notification of the calamity on returning from Moseley with Charles Lloyd, and we must now look at his companion before we proceed to look at the way in which Coleridge responded to Lamb's request for consolation.

As early as 1794, Lloyd<sup>11</sup> was writing to his younger brother:

Do not give way to useless speculation. I advise you particularly to read Rousseau's "Emilius", in French if you can, and pray, out of regard to Charles, who now earnestly entreats, pay particular attention to the Savoyard vicar's confessions of faith, in the 2nd or 3rd vol. Get that book at all events. Do not attend to the intricacies of sectarian peculiarities; be a good man, retain a pure heart, but oh! avoid alike the Quaker and the Libertine, the Methodist and the Atheist.<sup>12</sup>

Lloyd was clearly eager to be active and had little sympathy for the strict and uncomprehending attitude adopted by his parents.<sup>13</sup> Lloyd seems to have believed in the energy of Rousseauistic feeling and to have regarded the attitudes of his parents as wholly restraining. He is conscious of his own instability. Writing to Manning in May 1799, he talks of his 'complaint':

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10. Corr. 8. pp. 39-41. For a newspaper report of the tragedy, see The Morning Chronicle for Sept. 26th, 1796, quoted in E.V.Lucas (ed.) The Letters of Charles Lamb. Vol. I. p. 40.
  11. For sources for Lloyd, see (B.C). See also C.Lamb. ed. E.V.Lucas. Charles Lamb and the Lloyds. (B.C). See also M.Carr (B.Di).
  12. Charles Lamb and the Lloyds. pp. 13-14.
  13. In a letter of Jan. 6th, 1799, (Lloyd-Manning Letters. ed. F.L. Beafy. 4. p. 19). Lloyd blames the uncomprehending attitude of his parents for the condition of his sister which was similar to his own.



- I have been more affected with my complaint than ever insomuch that for nearly 24 hours together I never have been able to sit down lest I should immediately fall into a state of insensibility - I have written a novel which I like & which I very much wish you to see - <sup>14</sup>

If we turn to Lloyd's Poems on Various Subjects, published in 1795, we can see the manner in which he dramatised his own state of mind. Lloyd's identification with the conventional image<sup>15</sup> of the melancholy solitary is most apparent in the opening lines of his rendering of Petrarch's 'Solo e pensoso i piu deserti campi ...' in his tenth sonnet:

Where Nature frowns uncultur'd and forlorn  
I love alone to wander, sad and slow,  
O'er tracts by friendly footsteps never worn,  
With eyes averted desolate I go.<sup>16</sup>

Although Lloyd praises the tranquil power of nature in his early poems, the predominant feeling is one of anger at the moral mediocrity of human behaviour towards other humans. Nature is a retreat from anger, but Lloyd is much more concerned to explore anger and its causes than to idealise the retreat. In a long poem entitled "The Melancholy Man",<sup>17</sup> Lloyd details the symptoms of the disease. He sees melancholy as the result of thwarted idealism, and he assumes that the man who is made melancholy is the most

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14. Lloyd-Manning Letters. 12. p. 35. The novel to which Lloyd refers was his second - Isabel.

15. Belmour, for instance, is described in almost the same way in Thelwall's The Peripatetic Vol. I. pp. 61-62:  
"... since, without at all observing who I was, or even lifting his dejected eyes from the earth, he turned with sullen insensibility away, and endeavoured to avoid a rencounter".

16. Poems on Various Subjects. Sonnet X. p. 16.

17. Ibid. pp. 55-61.

sensitive and the most worthy. Although Lloyd never makes it explicit, there is here the same feeling that underlies the thinking of John Thelwall. Lloyd assumes that only a man of active feeling is truly human. He it is, who is able to realise fully God's intention in creating the category of man in the universe of beings. The frustration of angelic feeling in such a man reduces him to an order of being which is less than human. At the beginning of the poem, Lloyd ostentatiously refers to the melancholy man as a 'distracted Thing',<sup>18</sup> and the loss of a fanciful vision leaves the man conscious yet as inanimate and unfeeling as a 'stone'.<sup>19</sup> In "The Melancholy Man", Lloyd seems to have distanced himself from the madness that he describes, and he seems able to retain a sense of the true value of humanity in the light of which he can view melancholia with disapproval. Yet the depth of depression to which Lloyd could shrink is shown in "Stanzas on seeing a Maniac",<sup>20</sup> where he begins by adopting the attitude that he had taken in "The Melancholy Man" - showing disapproval of the descent from humanity, but ends by realising that such a descent is the only effective way by which to avoid the disappointments which arise from an optimistic belief in human possibilities. Whereas Thelwall had been prepared to assume the fusion of a rational deduction of desired ends with natural feeling in his theories, Lloyd seems to have experienced acutely their disjunction in practice. In theory, reason and feeling might inter-act until they are united, so that a vision of harmony and happiness might stimulate activity which would contribute to the realisation of the vision, but in practice, Lloyd says, the rational goal never seems any nearer fulfilment whilst the

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18. Ibid. stanza 2.

19. Ibid. stanza 12.

20. Ibid. pp. 99-101.

benevolent feelings which it stimulates are consistently spurned. Lloyd presents himself as a confirmed sceptic, and it is clear that he required intellectual satisfaction before his depression could be removed.

Coleridge at first took charge of Lloyd in September, 1796, as his tutor but it soon became clear that tuition and therapy were to be closely mixed. Coleridge was able to see how far consolation might be rational. But before we turn to Coleridge's attempts to console both Lamb and Lloyd, we must see the full extent of Lloyd's illness whilst he was with Coleridge, and also observe that Coleridge himself was not far from a similar state of instability and restlessness.

On November 5th, 1796, Coleridge wrote to Thomas Poole, describing in detail the great pain that he was suffering. He concludes his account:

- I am not mad, most noble Festus! - but in sober sadness I have suffered this day more bodily pain than I had before a conception of -. My right cheek has certainly been placed with admirable exactness under the focus of some invisible Burning-Glass, which concentrated all the Rays of a Tartarean Sun. - My medical attendant decides it to be altogether nervous, and that it originates either in severe application, or excessive anxiety. - My beloved Poole! in excessive anxiety, I believe, it might originate! - I have a blister under my right-ear, and I take 25 drops of Laudanum every five hours: the ease & spirits gained by which have enabled me to write to you this flighty, but not exaggerating, account -. With a gloomy wantonness of Imagination I had been coquetting with the hideous Possibles of Disappointment - I drank fears, like wormwood; yea, made myself drunken with bitterness! for my ever-shaping & distrustful mind still mingled gall-drops, till out of the cup of Hope I almost poisoned myself with Despair!<sup>21</sup>

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21. Griggs. 151. p. 250.

Coleridge feared disappointment in his desire to live in the country near Thomas Poole. However, Coleridge's attention must have been diverted from himself to the condition of Lloyd which, as he says in a letter of November 14th to Charles Lloyd, senior, was 'unsatisfactory'.<sup>22</sup> Coleridge was so concerned that he called in Dr. Beddoes.<sup>23</sup> In explaining this choice to Lloyd's father, Coleridge shows that he realised that Lloyd required a special kind of treatment:

I chose Dr. Beddoes, because he is a philosopher, and the knowledge of mind is essentially requisite in order to the well-treating of your Son's distemper.... Such is Dr. Beddoe's written opinion. But he told me, that your Son's cure must be effected by Sympathy and Calmness - by being in company with some one before whom he thought aloud on all subjects, and by being in situations perfectly according with the tenderness of his Disposition...<sup>24</sup>

Beddoes's actual diagnosis is missing, but the account of Lloyd's illness which Coleridge gave Thomas Poole the next day is probably derived from it.

Coleridge writes to Poole:

Charles Lloyd has been very ill, and his distemper (which may with equal propriety be named either Somnambulism, or frightful Reverie, or Epilepsy from accumulated feelings) is alarming. He falls all at once into a kind of Night-mair: and all the realities round him mingle with, and form a part of, the strange Dream. All his voluntary powers are suspended; but he perceives every thing & hears every thing, and whatever he perceives & hears he perverts into the substance of his delirious Vision. He has had two principal fits, and the last has left a feebleness behind & occasional flightiness. Dr. Beddoes has been called in. -

I want consolation, my friend! my Brother! Write & console me.<sup>25</sup>

22. Griggs. 154. p. 256.

23. For Beddoes, see Part II. Chapter 9.

24. Griggs. 154. p. 256.

25. Griggs. 155. p. 257.

During the next few weeks, Coleridge's anxieties increased. He seems to have tried unsuccessfully, to rid himself of the responsibility of looking after Lloyd, taking the move to the country as his opportunity, and, at the same time, he was in a frenzy from his sensing that Poole was luke-warm about Coleridge's desire to settle at Nether Stowey. The cottage scheme had come to symbolise rest for Coleridge and he is distracted by the possibility that his hopes may be dashed. However, the uncertainty passed and Coleridge moved to Nether Stowey at the end of 1796. After staying for a week with Poole whilst a room was prepared for him in Coleridge's cottage, Lloyd rejoined Coleridge at the beginning of 1797. He seems to have been well at first, but by the middle of March, Coleridge is writing to Cottle:

I write under great anguish of mind, Charles Lloyd being very ill. He has been seized with his fits three times in the space of seven days; and just as I was in bed, last night, I was called up again - and from 12 o'clock at night to five this morning he remained in one continued state of agoniz'd Delirium. What with the bodily toil exerted in repressing his frantic struggles, and what with the feelings of anguish for his agonies, you may suppose that I have forced myself from bed with aching temples & a feeble frame. I was not in bed till after five. - <sup>26</sup>

Lloyd was not domesticated with Coleridge for much longer. It is likely that he left Nether Stowey in March, probably as soon as he was sufficiently recovered to return to Birmingham.<sup>27</sup> The circumstances of the separation are obscure, but there was certainly gradual estrangement, which may well have been encouraged by Southey with whom Lloyd became more friendly and with whom he was in residence when, in November, 1797, he completed his

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26. Griggs. 181. p. 315.

27. This is Griggs' deduction. See Griggs. p. 320n.

novel Edmund Oliver which Coleridge was to see as an attack upon himself when it was published in 1798.<sup>28</sup> Lloyd was to deny that he had at all been the cause of an estrangement which also caused Lamb to separate himself from Coleridge temporarily, but, later, Lamb implied that it was a part of Lloyd's illness that his good faith was not entirely to be trusted.<sup>29</sup> We must now look at the view of consolation that Coleridge developed and tried to put into practice when he was so suddenly confronted with the sufferings of his two young acquaintances at the end of 1796, and when he, too, was at times clearly on the brink of similar instability.

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28. See Griggs. 243. pp. 404-405.

29. See Griggs. pp. 405-406n. 3.



## CHAPTER VIII

Coleridge and Consolation, 1796-1797

Coleridge seems to have been inclined to find one explanation for the sorts of instability with which he was confronted. Just as, in The Watchman, Coleridge had been aware of the dangers of unbridled sensuality and of artificial, 'literary' sensibility, so now he becomes aware of the threat to stability of unbridled actual sensibility. In a letter to John Colson, dated September 4th, 1796, Coleridge writes:

My Colson! this is a hard World because of Error & Vice - and you, I imagine, are placed in a situation to see much misery, & alas! a heart to sympathize - perhaps too keenly. Good young man, dear ingenious Child of Sensibility! waste not yourself in vain efforts - for the sake of the miserable, whom your heart throbs to relieve, be prudent with regard to yourself - but above all things, I intreat you, my dear Colson! to preserve your faith in Christ!<sup>1</sup>

Coleridge now fears excessive sensibility, but his answer is not to retreat to a belief in the controlling significance of reason that Southey had earlier placed in opposition to his own extreme expression of feeling, but instead to assert the importance of Christian faith. Coleridge's answer becomes apparent in a discussion of Charles Lloyd in a letter of September 24th, 1796, to Thomas Poole. Coleridge first describes Lloyd's condition:

Charles Lloyd wins upon me hourly - his heart is uncommonly pure, his affections delicate, & his benevolence enlivened, but not sicklied, by sensibility.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of this letter, Coleridge quotes two sonnets by Lloyd, and he

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1. Griggs. 141. pp. 234-235.

2. Griggs. 142. p. 236.

introduces them to Poole in the following manner:

I shall write on the other side of the Paper two of Charles Lloyd's Sonnets which he wrote in one evening at Birmingham - The latter of them alludes to the conviction of the truth of Christianity, which he had received from me, for he had been, if not a Deist, yet quite a Sceptic - <sup>3</sup>

The contrast between the sonnets which Coleridge quotes and Lloyd's earlier poems indicates the way in which Coleridge attempted to fortify Lloyd's sensibility. Lloyd's second sonnet ends:

Omniscient Father! I have been perplex'd  
With Scoffers link'd! yea, called them my Friends  
That snare the Soul - but Doubt & black Despair  
Are past! My heart, no longer sorely vex'd,  
May now unshroud itself - it's aim extends  
To Heaven! - For thou, my best Friend! dwellest there!<sup>4</sup>

It is religious consolation that Lamb requests from Coleridge a few days later, and Coleridge provides it in his important letter which Lamb always treasured. Writing concerning Mary's deed, Coleridge begins his letter to Charles Lamb:

Your letter, my friend, struck me with a mighty horror. It rushed upon me and stupefied my feelings. You bid me write you a religious letter. I am not a man who would attempt to insult the greatness of your anguish by any other consolation. Heaven knows that in the easiest fortunes there is much dissatisfaction and weariness of spirit; much that calls for the exercise of patience and resignation; but in storms like these, that shake the dwelling and make the heart tremble, there is no middle way between despair and the yielding up of the whole spirit under the guidance of faith. And surely it is a matter of joy that your faith in Jesus has been preserved; the Comforter that

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3. See Griggs. pp. 237-238.

4. See Griggs. p. 238. Notice the emphasis on the paternity of God. This is a crude form of Coleridge's concentration upon Divine Being.

should relieve you is not far from you. But as you are a Christian, in the name of that Saviour, who was filled with bitterness and made drunken with wormwood, I conjure you to have recourse in frequent prayer to 'his God and your God;' the God of mercies, and father of all comfort. Your poor father is, I hope, almost senseless of the calamity; the unconscious instrument of Divine Providence knows it not, and your mother is in heaven. It is sweet to be roused from a frightful dream by the song of birds and the gladsome rays of the morning. Ah, how infinitely more sweet to be awakened from the blackness and amazement of a sudden horror by the glories of God manifest and the hallelujahs of angels.<sup>5</sup>

Coleridge then continues:

As to what regards yourself, I approve altogether of your abandoning what you justly call vanities. I look upon you as a man called by sorrow and anguish and a strange desolation of hopes into quietness, and a soul set apart and made peculiar to God! We cannot arrive at any portion of heavenly bliss without in some measure imitating Christ; and they arrive at the largest inheritance who imitate the most difficult parts of his character, and, bowed down and crushed underfoot, cry in fulness of faith, 'Father, thy will be done'.<sup>6</sup>

Coleridge concludes his letter with this injunction:

I charge you, my dearest friend, not to dare to encourage gloom or despair. You are a temporary sharer in human miseries that you may be an eternal partaker of the Divine nature.<sup>7</sup>

In trying to suggest reflections on both Mary's deed and Charles's suffering, Coleridge makes two different points. He first claims that Mary's action unconsciously fulfills a pre-existent providential scheme, and he, secondly, wishes to claim that human suffering is beneficial as part of

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5. Griggs. 143. pp. 238-239.

6. Griggs. 143. p. 239.

7. Griggs. 143. p. 239.

a progression towards union with God. It is this union of human being and Divine being for which Coleridge is now striving, and, in October, 1796, he is planning to retreat from cities and from involvement in political affairs so as to provide for himself the sort of rural environment that makes contemplation possible. Coleridge, in other words, is now attempting to put into practice the self-conditioning which, in the Theological Lectures, he had come to see as being the function, mentally, of the imagination. In letters written at the end of October, Lamb is uncertain of both Coleridge's aim and method of proceeding. On October 24th, he writes to Coleridge:

I read your letters with my sister, and they give us both abundance of delight. Especially they please us when you talk in a religious strain: not but we are offended occasionally with a certain freedom of expression, a certain air of mysticism, more consonant to the conceits of pagan philosophy than consistent with the humility of genuine piety. To instance now, in your last letter you say, "It is by the press that God hath given finite spirits, both evil and good, (I suppose you mean simply bad men and good men), a portion as it were of His Omnipresence!" Now, high as the human intellect comparatively will soar, and wide as its influence, malign or salutary, can extend, is there not, Coleridge, a distance between the Divine Mind and it, which makes such language blasphemy? Again, in your first fine consolatory epistle, you say, "you are a temporary sharer in human misery, that you may be an eternal partaker of the Divine Nature." What more than this do those men say who are for exalting the man Christ Jesus into the second person of an unknown Trinity? - men whom you or I scruple not to call idolaters. Man, full of imperfections at best, and subject to wants which momentarily remind him of dependence; man, a weak and ignorant being, "servile" from his birth "to all the skiey influences", with eyes sometimes open to discern the right path, but a head generally too dizzy to pursue it; man, in the pride of speculation, forgetting his nature, and hailing in himself the future God, must make the angels laugh. Be not angry with me Coleridge: I wish not to cavil; I know I

cannot instruct you; I only wish to remind you of that humility which best becometh the Christian character. God, in the New Testament, (our best guide), is represented to us in the kind, condescending, amiable, familiar light of a parent; and in my poor mind 'tis best for us so to consider of him, as our heavenly father, and our best friend, without indulging too bold conceptions of his nature.<sup>8</sup>

Lamb's reactions to Coleridge's speculation clearly indicate that the position which was latent in the Theological Lectures - that man may become as God, was now being explicitly argued by Coleridge. Equally clearly, Coleridge was aware of the possible implications of identity with God. If union with God may be achieved, Coleridge is aware that man may possess the distinctive attributes of God, including His Omnipresence and, perhaps, His Omniscience. The implications of the goal are clear and important, but it is consideration of suffering and consolation that seems to have provided Coleridge with a theoretical framework within which he could see that the goal might be achieved. We need now to look carefully at the nature of Coleridge's thinking at this period.

In a letter to Thomas Poole, dated November 1st, 1796, Coleridge casually mentions the areas of his intellectual interest at the time. He writes:

I do not particularly admire Rosseau - Bishop Taylor, Old Baxter, David Hartley & the Bishop of Cloyne are my men.<sup>9</sup>

In the same letter, again casually, Coleridge discusses the ideas of Fenelon:

Almost all the followers of Fenelon believe that men are degraded Intelligences, who had once all existed, at one

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8. Corr. 11. pp. 49-50.

9. Griggs. 146. p. 245.

time & together, in a paradisiacal or perhaps heavenly state.<sup>10</sup>

In a footnote to the first list of authors, E. L. Griggs comments that Jeremy Taylor, Richard Baxter, David Hartley, and George Berkeley, 'form indeed a heterogeneous group',<sup>11</sup> but sense can be made of this grouping as well as of the contemporaneous knowledge of Fenelon and of Coleridge's reading, at the time, of the Philosophical Principles of Chevalier Ramsay, of the Works of John Woolman, and of Mrs. Inchbald's novel Nature and Art.<sup>12</sup>

There are two main emphases that I want to bring out. Firstly, Coleridge now states that he dislikes Rousseau. There is, in other words, a specific disenchantment with excessive feeling and sensibility, but this does not involve a retreat to reason. On the contrary, Coleridge wishes to argue for the possible identity between pure human being and the being of

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10. Griggs. 146. p. 246.

11. Griggs. p. 245n.

12. Coleridge borrowed Vol. II of George Berkeley's Works (1784 in 2 vols.) from the Bristol Library from March 10-28, 1796. For Berkeley, see (B.C); also see H. M. Bracken (B.Di); A. A. Luce (B.Di); R. A. Watson (B.Di).

I follow Griggs in assuming that 'old Baxter' is Richard Baxter, although Coleridge's reading at this time might suggest Andrew Baxter. K. Coburn refers to Coleridge's remembrance of reading Andrew Baxter in the Summer of 1795 (Note-books. 174n. 20). The advantage of the Richard Baxter interpretation is that it seems to fit the theme of the seventeenth century divines, but a case could be made for arguing that Coleridge was pursuing an interest in dreams in Andrew Baxter, Erasmus Darwin, and also in parts of Ramsay's Philosophical Principles.

For David Hartley, see Part II. Chapter 1. (9)n.

For Jeremy Taylor, see (B.C). See also H.R. Williamson (B.Di); and T. Wood (B.Di). I discuss those works which Coleridge later adorned with marginal notes. Professor Whalley advises me that there is no evidence to suggest that the marginalia belong to the 1796 period, and hence I treat Coleridge's comments with caution. However, I think it probable that Coleridge was not simply acquainted with the one set of sermons of Taylor which he borrowed from the Bristol Library from Sept. 22nd to Oct. 12th, 1796.

For John Woolman, see (B.C), and also J.P. Whitney (B.Di).

For Mrs. Inchbald, see (B.C).

For Ramsay, see (B.C), and also G.D. Henderson (B.Di). Coleridge was borrowing Ramsay's Philosophical Principles from the Bristol Library from 2-16, Sept. and from 12-26, Oct., 1796.



God. Coleridge now begins to become interested in passivity and receptivity as a means of consolation, but, more significantly, and this is my second point, I want to suggest that, following up his sense of the inter-relation of wisdom and ardour, Coleridge wants to indicate that the process of reconciliation with pure being enforced by suffering is the means to wisdom and knowledge.

In a footnote to a letter written to Coleridge on December 10th, 1796, Lamb comments:

I will get Nature and Art: have not seen it yet, nor any of Jeremy Taylor's works.<sup>13</sup>

Obviously Coleridge had recommended Mrs. Inchbald's novel to Lamb at the same time as he also recommended Jeremy Taylor's works. Mrs. Inchbald presents happiness as the inevitable corollary of humble, natural simplicity, and 'remorse' of pretension. In the novel a brother who chooses to pay attention to 'persons' rather than 'things' is rewarded,<sup>14</sup> whereas the other brother's choice leads him to suffer irredeemable remorse. As always, Coleridge is concerned with transformation and is not content with a conclusive moralistic attitude. For Coleridge, 'remorse' must somehow be redeemable, whilst, at the same time, he sees it as the necessary prerequisite for wisdom and knowledge. Mrs. Inchbald's novel presents two 'sentimental' themes and projects a wholly secular morality. The possibility of redemption or transformation, however, raises again a problem of Christian theology which Coleridge had discussed in his Theological Lectures. I suggest that interest in the theme of 'remorse' must have complemented Coleridge's interest in the works of the English casuistical

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13. Corr. 17. p. 68.

14. See Mrs. Inchbald. Nature and Art. Vol. II. p. 128. (B.C).

divines of the second half of the seventeenth century, notably the two authors, Jeremy Taylor and Richard Baxter, whom he mentioned in his letter to Thomas Poole. In the context of Coleridge's interest in Woolman, the title of Taylor's most known work, 'Holy Living' would have been sufficient attraction for Coleridge, but, elsewhere, the Bishop of Down and Connor discusses problems which certainly engaged Coleridge at a later date, for his marginal comments are extant. In a manuscript comment facing the title page of Jeremy Taylor's The Worthy Communicant, Coleridge makes the crucial theological point quite explicit:

In general, the more I reflect on this work, the stronger is my conjecture, that the doctrine of Work, i.e. Roman or Pagan Christianity is at the foundation. The demands seem every while to lie between two intolerable Theses: either that God's Justice is merciless and disproportionate to the capabilities of our Nature - or that the Cross of Christ is of no effect. For if in order to use any of the means of Grace / since if not this one, why any? Prayer, for instance? the man must be fit to die, and have already conquered Sin, in a very subordinate degree can it be deemed a means of Grace in any other sense than as Angels might need it - for they too go on from Grace to Grace. - Surely, true Sanctification is an effect, and a part of the Redemption, not a cause. Redemption is a free Gift - not Wages, no, nor even Reward.<sup>15</sup>

Coleridge's conclusion here may not be the view to which he would have subscribed in 1796, but his summary of the dilemma is surely valid for the early period. It is worth noting the language in which Taylor describes the manner in which a man should approach Holy Communion:

Now let us by the aids of memory and fancy consider the children of Israel in the Wilderness, in a barren and dry Land where no water was, march in dust and fire, not wet with the dew of Heaven,

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15. J. Taylor. The Worthy Communicant. MS note opposite the title page.

wholly without moisture, save only what dropt from their own brows; the air was fire, and the vermin was fire; the flying serpents were of the same cognation with the firmament, their sting was a flame, their venome was a feaver, and the feavor a calenture, and their whole state of abode and travel was a little image of the day of Judgment, when the Elements shall melt with fervent heat; These men like Salamanders walking in fire, dry with heat, and scorched with thirst, and made yet more thirsty by calling upon God for water; suppose, I say, these thirsty souls hearing Moses to promise that he will smite the rock, and that a River should break forth from thence, observe how presently they ran to the foot of the springing stone, thrusting forth their heads and tongues to meet the water, impatient of delay, crying out that the water did not move like light, all at once: and then suppose the pleasure of their drink, the unsatiableness of their desire, the immensity of their appetite; they took in as much as they could, and they desired much more. This was their Sacrament of the same Mystery, and this was their manner of receiving it; and this teaches us to come to the same Christ with the same desires. For if that water was a type of our Sacrament, or a Sacrament of the same secret blessing, then that thirst is a signification of our duty, that we come to receive Christ in all the ways of reception with longing appetites, preferring him before all the interests of the world, as birds do corn above jewels, or hungry men meat before long orations.<sup>16</sup>

The rigour of Taylor's position terrifies Coleridge. Taylor makes explicit a distinction between contrition and attrition:

As soon as we are smitten with the terrours of an afflicted conscience, and apprehend the evil of sin, or fear the Divine judgments, and upon that account resolve to leave our sin, we are not instantly worthy and fit to communicate. Attrition is not a competent disposition to the blessed Sacrament; because although it may be the gate and entrance of a spiritual life,

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16. J. Taylor. The Worthy Communicant. pp. 96-97.

yet it can be no more, unless there be love in it; unless it be contrition, it is not a state of favour and grace, but a disposition to it.<sup>17</sup>

Again, Coleridge retorts forcefully in his marginal comment which, once more, is fragmentary:

But this is dangerous doctrine unless it be added, that there Attrition with a sense of its imperfection and can earnestly desire to raise it into contrition, and that into a Love of God, is itself a beginning & a mode of Contrition. -<sup>18</sup>

The important point here is that Coleridge wants to entertain the possibility that redemption may be progressively achieved, that attrition may become contrition, and that remorse may be transformed so that it may become the origin of wise knowledge of the being of God. I am suggesting, therefore, that Coleridge was led by contemporary secular and essentially Rousseauistic thinking about 'remorse', and by the Quaker fusion of feeling and religious passivity,<sup>19</sup> to re-think the issues concerning Redemption that had been raised in the Theological Lectures. It became possible that 'remorse', with all its associations derived from a 'sentimental' context, might be a purifying suffering which was a means to redemption and union with God. Hence, Coleridge's emphasis upon consolation at this time caused him, for the benefit of others, to want to justify suffering as part of a process culminating in union with God, at the same time as his reading of Thelwall's The Peripatetic would have made him aware of a possible natural

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17. J. Taylor. The Worthy Communicant. p. 294.

18. MS note for The Worthy Communicant. p. 294.

19. For related passages in J. Woolman (B.C), see pages 5-6; 11; 37. See also the passage from Woolman which Lamb quotes in Corr. 19. p. 74. See also W. Penn (B.C).

process of therapy independent of any rational schema. Towards the end of 1796, Coleridge was therefore able to consider the transformation of remorse both in instinctual and in intellectual terms. The distinctive feature of the intellectual comprehension was that it did not simply imply an integration of personality as an end, but also implied that the integration necessarily involved a heightened knowledge. Coleridge's reading of the Chevalier Ramsay may have pushed his thinking in this latter direction. In the writing of Ramsay, quietism is fused, not with seventeenth century theology but with eighteenth century empirical philosophy. In this context, 'remorse' may not be the means to 'redemption' so much as the means to knowledge of 'things-in-themselves'.<sup>20</sup>

Like the quietists,<sup>21</sup> Ramsay recommends total passivity, but the following passage indicates that this emphasis is here linked to an epistemological terminology:

Hence in all states, fallen and unfallen, all finite intelligences in order to enjoy the supreme felicity and perfection of their natures, that is, the supernatural knowledge and love of the absolute Infinite, must expose their faculties to his immediate influence, by a free conversion of all their powers to the eternal source of life, light and love. They must remain freely passive before him to receive his divine irradiations and motions. They have all but one essential, primitive and original law, in order to be continued in, or restored to their supreme happiness; which is to stand still before the BEING OF BEINGS, that he may flow into them, irradiate their understandings, animate their wills, and become their only Reason and their only Law.<sup>22</sup>

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20. Perhaps this phrase has an illicit, but, nevertheless, deliberate Kantian ring.

21. See for instance the prayer of Mme. Guyon cited in Pierre Janet (B.Di). pp. 95-96.

22. Ramsay. (B.C). Vol. I. p. 307.

The free passivity about which Ramsay writes is achieved in a form of prayer which does not require linguistic expression:

True spiritual prayer does not consist in the multiplicity of words, nor in fine speculations, nor in enthusiastic raptures, nor in soft, tender, and delicious sensations: but in a constant tendency of the soul to its first principle. It is thus that it recalls its wandering thoughts and affections, that it reunites its different powers, that it retires into its spiritual nature, to adore in silence him that surpasses all expression and all conception. It is thus that it exposes its degraded, weakened, and sick faculties to his luminous and purifying influences, which elevate, fortify, and cure them. This is that adoration in spirit and in truth of which the gospel speaks.<sup>23</sup>

The knowledge that is attained in this manner cannot be linguistically defined, but neither is it delusive:

True, supernatural, living faith is not a speculative conviction of any system of truths how sublime soever; all these the devils believe and know better than any mortal; but it is as the apostle defines it 'the evidence of things not seen'. It is a divine light in the soul that opens its intellectual view not to see visions, revelations, and fanatical chimeras; but to discover the laws of eternal order; the all of God, the nothingness of the creature, and the immutable relations betwixt both. It is a vital, quick, spiritual sensation by which the soul sees God in all, and all in God, not in the Malebranchian sense, but by receiving all from him as our source, and in referring all to him as our end. In fine it is a constant submission, evacuation, and sacrifice of all our finite, imperfect, feeble activities and thoughts to the dictates and orders of his eternal will, whether manifested by inspired revelation, enlightened reason, or the dispensations of his providence, and a full persuasion that they are conformable to infinite wisdom, goodness, and justice, however contradictory they may appear to our bounded reason, and to our natural self-love.<sup>24</sup>

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23. Ramsay. (B.C). Vol. I. p. 401.

24. Ramsay. (B.C). Vol. I. pp. 403-404.



Ramsay's work assumes that the spiritual influence to which he refers is of a physical nature. Ramsay identifies his spiritual influence with Sir Isaac Newton's 'ethereal fluid'.<sup>25</sup> Here Ramsay resolutely parts company from Bishop Berkeley, but it is not all easy to be sure where Coleridge might stand.<sup>26</sup> Ramsay writes of Berkeley:

The Doctor does not pretend that it is finite spirits that excite in us all these perceptions, but God alone: we have already shown that the infinite mind cannot be the immediate cause of these ideas, sensations and modifications; and therefore there must be a third substance betwixt God and human souls, that really acts upon us to produce in us different sensations, according to our different organs, states and situations.<sup>27</sup>

It is this possibility of a physical, non-linguistic relationship between beings which underlies Thelwall's sense of the possibility of natural therapy that stood, for Coleridge, in opposition to the linguistically formulated Christian scheme of redemption. Ramsay offers the possibility that the physical relationships within the universe can also be subsumed under a broad systematic explanation that is integrated with a Deistic world-view. For Ramsay, Berkeley's position is too mentalistic, but I suggest that Coleridge retained his fundamental allegiance to Berkeley's philosophical position since it made logically possible the identification of the Divine mind with the human mind. However, from a position of Berkeleian union with God,

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25. See I. Newton (B.C). pp. 349-353.

26. The issue at stake here is great. I wish to claim that Coleridge's monistic position was still fundamentally materialist and not immaterialist, and that the spirit world of The Ancient Mariner is at first placed as a human 'fiction' even if Coleridge came to believe in the physical existence of spiritual forces by the time of writing his 'gloss' for the poem.

27. Ramsay. (B.C). Vol. I. p. 241.

Coleridge is now able to survey two systems of explanation concerning the relation between man and God: the first is a Christian scheme of redemption that has been imposed on observation of the causes and effects of 'remorse', and the second is a scheme which contains material of an amoral description of the physical world that has been grafted to a pre-existent conception of universal harmony and order. I want to suggest that these two different world-views are subtly inter-mingled in The Ancient Mariner, Coleridge's experience of the suffering of his friends caused him to formulate theories which might help them to recover mental stability, but I want finally to indicate that, particularly through contact with Dr. Beddoes, Coleridge's curiosity was aroused concerning the medical explanations for the states which he hoped to appease. These explanations also contribute to the complexity of Coleridge's whole thinking.

## CHAPTER IX

Beddoes<sup>1</sup> and Medicine, 1796-1797

On December 31st, 1796, Coleridge wrote to John Thelwall:

The passage in your letter respecting your mother affected me greatly. - Well, true or false, Heaven is a less gloomy idea than Annihilation! - Dr. Beddoes, & Dr. Darwin<sup>2</sup> think that Life is utterly inexplicable, writing as Materialists - You, I understand, have adopted the idea that it is the result of organized matter acted on by external Stimuli. - As likely as any other system; but you assume the thing to be proved - the 'capability of being stimulated into sensation' as a property of organized matter - now 'the Capab.' &c is my definition of animal Life - Monro<sup>3</sup> believes in a plastic immaterial Nature - all-pervading -

And what if all of animated Nature

Be but organic harps diversely fram'd

That tremble into thought as o'er them sweeps

Plastic & vast &c -

(by the bye - that is my favorite of my poems - do you like it?) Hunter<sup>4</sup> that the Blood is the Life - which is saying nothing at all - for if the blood were Life, it could never be otherwise than Life - and to say, it is alive, is saying nothing - & Ferriar<sup>5</sup>

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1. For Beddoes, see (B.C).
  2. For Erasmus Darwin, see (B.C). Also see D. King-Hole. Erasmus Darwin. (B.Di).
  3. Alexander Monro, secundus. (1733-1817) - 'anatomist'. D.N.B. Vol. 38. pp. 180-181.
  4. John Hunter (1728-1793) - 'anatomist and surgeon'. D.N.B. Vol. 28. pp. 287-293.
  5. John Ferriar (1761-1815) - 'physician'. D.N.B. Vol. 18. pp. 389-390. See also (B.C) and F.M.Brockbank (B.Di).

believes in a Soul, like an orthodox Churchman - So much for Physicians & Surgeons - Now as to the Metaphysicians, Plato says, it is Harmony - he might as well have said, a fiddle stick's end - but I love Plato - his dear gorgeous Nonsense! And I, tho' last not least, I do not know what to think about it - on the whole, I have rather made up my mind that I am a mere apparition - a naked Spirit! - And that Life is I myself I! which is a mighty clear account of it. Now I have written all this not to expose my ignorance (that is an accidental effect, not the final cause) but to shew you, that I want to see your Essay on Animal Vitality<sup>6</sup> - of which Bowles,<sup>7</sup> the Surgeon, spoke in high Terms - Yet he believes in a body & a soul.<sup>8</sup>

Interest in the origin and nature of 'Life' had developed in the Eighteenth Century as the Newtonian influence on biology, most evidenced in the work, in England, of Stephen Hales,<sup>9</sup> had diminished. Equally, the work of two Swiss

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6. No longer extant. There is, equally, no certainty that Coleridge ever saw this essay.

7. Bowles was a surgeon at Bristol.

8. Griggs. 170. p. 294.

The evidence of this letter suggests that Coleridge was aware of materialist arguments and of beliefs in 'plastic immaterial Nature' as mentioned not simply by Monro but possibly by Cudworth. The significant point is that he does not express commitment to either the materialist or the immaterialist position. Coleridge's attitude to the lines from 'This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison' would seem to be that they contain fine poetic truths but not necessarily philosophic truths. Since Coleridge presents his own philosophical position later in the letter, it seems reasonable to suppose that his own lines might contain 'gorgeous nonsense' as much as Plato's opinions. I discuss Coleridge's growing separation of poetry from philosophy in Part II. Chapter 10. Two other phrases of this letter deserve comment. Firstly, Coleridge's portrayal of himself as an 'apparition' - that he is himself an exposed vital force, a pure being, a 'naked Spirit' implies a separation of primary and secondary qualities of being. Secondly, the phrase 'Life is I myself I' implies that Life is individual self-assertion and is in a different category from 'scientific' analysis of a materialist or an immaterialist being. In Kantian terms, Coleridge is referring to a Transcendental Self, and the position towards which he is groping might now be described as 'existentialist'. (See K.Jaspers. (B.Di) - particularly on Descartes).

9. For Hales, see (B.C).

biologists, Abraham Trembley<sup>10</sup> and Charles Bonnet,<sup>11</sup> on generation had broken free, in the middle of the century, from the stagnant, classificatory attitude of Linnaeus<sup>12</sup> and his followers.

Whereas investigators in the first half of the century had been prepared to assume the existence of 'vital spirits' or 'animal spirits', it was this very 'vitality' that scientists in the second half of the century were anxious to examine. An illustration of the Brunonian<sup>13</sup> doctrine of 'life' given by a Mr. Christie in William Cullen Brown's preface to the 'Works of Dr. John Brown', published in 1804, vividly conveys the way in which Brown combined the two main explanations of the problem which were current during Coleridge's youth and so achieved a high degree of popularity as well as of notoriety. Mr. Christie writes:

Suppose a fire to be made in a grate, filled with a kind of fuel not very combustible, and which could only be kept burning by means of a machine containing several tubes, placed before it, and constantly pouring streams of air into it. Suppose also a pipe to be placed in the back of the chimney, through which a constant supply of fresh fuel was gradually let down into the grate, to repair the waste occasioned by the flame, kept up by the air machine.

The grate will represent the human frame; the fuel in it, the matter of life, the excitability of Dr. Brown, and the sensorial power of Dr. Darwin; the tube behind supplying fresh fuel, will denote the power of all living systems, constantly to regenerate

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10. For Trembley, see J.R.Baker (B.Di).

11. Charles Bonnet (1720-1793) - 'philosophe et naturaliste'. See Biographie Universelle, and also J.R.Baker. Abraham Trembley of Geneva. (B.Di).

12. For Linnaeus, see B.D.Jackson. (B.Di).

13. John Brown (1735-1788) - 'founder of the Brunonian system of medicine'. D.N.B. Vol. 7. pp. 14-17. See (B.C). See also J.D.Comrie (B.Di). p. 205. and A. Hayter (B.Di). pp. 26-27.

or reproduce excitability; while the air machine, of several tubes, denotes the various stimuli applied to the excitability of the body; and the flame drawn forth in consequence of that application represents life, the product of the exciting powers acting upon the excitability.

As Dr. BROWN has defined life to be a forced state, it is fitly represented by a flame, forcibly drawn forth from fuel little disposed to combustion, by the constant application of streams of air poured into it from the different tubes of a machine. If some of these tubes are supposed to convey pure, or dephlogisticated air, they will denote the highest class of exciting powers, opium, musk, camphor, spirits, wine, tobacco, Etc. the diffusible stimuli of Dr. Brown, which bring forth for a time a greater quantity of life than usual, as the blowing in of pure air into a fire will temporarily draw forth an uncommon quantity of flame. If others of the tubes be supposed to convey common or atmospheric air, they will represent the ordinary exciting powers, or stimuli, applied to the human frame, such as heat, light, air, food, drink, Etc. while such as convey impure or inflammable air, may be used to denote what have formerly been termed sedative powers, such as poisons, contagious miasmata, foul air, Etc.<sup>14</sup>

For Brown, this simple structure was all-inclusive since the 'remote' cause of every disease is reduced to one of only four possibilities: either 'excitability' or the 'exciting' force is too strong or too weak. For Brown's Edinburgh opponent, William Cullen,<sup>15</sup> this structure was so grossly over-simplified, the causality was so 'remote', that Brown's theory was of no use at all in assigning the 'proximate' cause of any specific disease. Nevertheless, 'Brunonianism' had metaphysical attractions, for it attempted to join the emphases which had previously prevailed in separation. During

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14. J. Brown. (ed. W.C.Brown). Works. (B.C). pp.ccxxiii-ccxxv.

15. William Cullen (1710-1790) - 'physician'. D.N.B. Vol. 13. pp. 279-282. See also (B.C); and J.D.Comrie (B.Di). p. 202.



the first half of the century mechanistic theories had seen the life of an individual as a microcosm of an universe in which God was a First Cause and was also, perhaps, immanent. In other words, the body was thought to be a mechanism which was somehow initially set in motion and which was also, perhaps, dependent on the continued activity of a soul. The tendency of mechanistic theory was to strip the 'soul' of religiously spiritual connotations, and yet a secularised 'soul' was still found to be necessary either to explain the way in which the mechanism began to perform or to explain, as well, its continued performance. In seeking a positivist physiological explanation of 'life', two emphases emerged. First of all, a developing understanding of combustion and respiration stimulated an interest in the inter-relation between the various constituents of the atmosphere as they were isolated and the functioning of the human body as it was gradually viewed in a bio-chemical rather than a mechanical way. Secondly, mechanistic theories concerning the relation between the body and the 'soul', however understood, had assumed that there was a significant relationship between volition and the functioning of the body. Even when the 'soul' became transformed into 'excitability' or 'irritability', it was assumed that all physical sensations were interpreted by the mind and that physical responses to sensation were not immediate, and that, equally, all human behaviour was, in some way, 'willed'. It gradually became clear, however, that some muscular activity was independent of the mind, and biologists proved experimentally that movement and, possibly, 'life' persisted and could be sustained or re-generated by electric shock. The increasing understanding of electricity and 'animal magnetism' led the way to a bio-physical conception of the relation between man and the

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universe as opposed to the bio-chemical conception of the first emphasis.<sup>16</sup>

Two important points emerge from the two trends that I have mentioned. In the period with which I am dealing, and reaching a climax of excitement in the 1790's, natural science seemed to be empirically under-scoring the naturalistic view of man's place in the universe which was being projected in the 'sentimental' literature. It was offering a description of how things physically are which corresponded to the description offered by, amongst others, Thelwall and Coleridge of how things morally ought to be, but, morally, were not. Both 'scientific' descriptions emphasized, in their different ways, firstly, that man is a natural part of a natural universe, and, secondly, that man's participation is unconscious.<sup>17</sup>

Some of these points can be illustrated with reference to one particular disease about which Beddoes<sup>18</sup> wrote, and references to which Coleridge would

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16. For the bio-physical relationship in various forms, see Albrecht von Haller (B.C). For a general discussion see F. Fearing (B.Di) and also L.S.King (B.Di). For Mesmerism, see D.H.Walmsley. (B.Di). For the specific connections of these movements with Coleridge, see Coleridge's reference to animal magnetism in his Reply to a letter to Edward Long Fox, and also see an article by Lane Cooper in Late Harvest. (B.Di).

17. For a discussion of the 'unconscious' before Freud, see L.L.Whyte. (B.Di).

18. Beddoes was essentially a bio-chemist, or an iatro-chemist, and his interests can be seen most clearly in his translations of Spallanzani and Bergmann and his popularisation of the work of Mayow. Interestingly, Priestley made breakthroughs in the chemistry of combustion and respiration, but he does not seem to have seen these as a potential base for a monist world-view, partly, I suspect, because his assumptions were still mechanist rather than vitalist. One problem of this discussion, of course, is that the segregation of bio-chemical and bio-physical can now be seen to be tenuous. However, it was only with Volta's efforts that the segregation which, for convenience, I have made breaks down by reason of electrochemical experimentation. The mechanist/vitalist duality is a convenience if used with care, but I certainly do not subscribe to Whitehead's view that the essence of Romanticism is a reaction against mechanism towards organicism. In Science and the Modern World (B.Di), Whitehead seems to me to have maligned Coleridge. For me, the strength of Coleridge's position is that he stands outside crude oscillations between types of rational explanation.

certainly have found whilst reading accounts of Travels and Voyages.<sup>19</sup> In 1792, Beddoes published his Observations on the Nature and Cure of Calculus, Sea-Scurvy, Catarrh and Fever. In the section devoted to a discussion of the scurvy, Beddoes mentions the work of several earlier writers, and attention to these writers gives us a miniature survey of the state of medicine in the period.<sup>20</sup>

An author whom Beddoes cites lavishly is Thomas Trotter,<sup>21</sup> whose Observations on the Scurvy was published in the same year as Beddoes' work. Towards the end of his account, Trotter indicates that he shares the enthusiasm of the decade in which he writes for the efficacy of air. The following sentiments show why Beddoes was happy to support Trotter's analysis:

The history of pure, vital air, comprehends the respiration of animals, the heat of the blood, and probably the hitherto unexplored subject of secretion. In vegetation it is equally useful: it is a component principle of water; it alone supports combustion; by it metals are calcined; it is the oxygenous principle in nature; in short its influence is unbounded, and the modifications of its agency are beyond calculation.<sup>22</sup>

Trotter argued that fruit and vegetables were efficacious in preventing scurvy because they conveyed oxygen to the body. He did not, in other words, confine the activity of oxygen simply to the respiratory process.<sup>23</sup>

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19. For Coleridge's reading of Travel accounts, see J.L.Lowes (B.Di).

20. The main authors whom Beddoes mentions are T.Trotter, J.Lind, and F.Milman. (See below).

21. Thomas Trotter (1760-1832) - 'physician to the fleet and author'. D.N.B. Vol. 57. pp. 254-255. See also (B.C).

22. T.Trotter. (B.C). p. 147. It was interest in the medical function of various airs that caused Beddoes to found his 'pneumatic Institution' in Bristol.

23. Equally, he was not prepared to accept that the affect of fruit and vegetables was purely nutritional, as had been James Lind.

If the position adopted by Trotter is the culmination of the bio-chemical medical emphasis in its application to scurvy, there was also one main writer of the period who related the opposing emphasis to the same disease. The full title of Francis Milman's <sup>24</sup> work, published in 1782, was An Enquiry into the Source from whence the Symptoms of the Scurvy and of Putrid Fevers, arise; and into the Seat which those Affections occupy in the Animal Oeconomy. Milman is concerned to elaborate a theory of Life. Whereas the bio-chemists tended to insist upon the prime importance of the external exciting forces, such as the air, which associated with the neutral structure of the body, the bio-physicists, by contrast, insisted on the priority of the vitality of the body, particularly of the 'muscular fibres'. Milman adequately presents this view in the following long passage:

Though the manner in which the various motions of the body are executed, as well as the more intimate structure of its fibres, may be for ever concealed from us; yet there are certain properties of these taught us by experiment, the existence and true use of which are as well ascertained as any part of human knowledge. That property of the muscular fibre, by which, on the application of a stimulus, it is enabled to move and to contract itself, is known to be derived from a principle inherent in the fibre, and, to a certain degree, independent even of life. For, though the destruction of this principle in the animal system is certain and immediate death, yet there are many causes which may take away life, and may leave this principle surviving in the muscular fibre; so that when all motion in the machine has ceased, and internal stimuli can be no longer applied, we can, for several days, by external stimuli, excite the muscular fibres to contraction, in consequence of this principle not being yet extinct in them.

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24. Francis Milman (1746-1821) - 'physician'. D.N.B. Vol. 38. p.1.

But though this property does not always end immediately with life, it begins with it; and it has therefore been called the vital power (a name which I shall continue to use) and the muscular fibre endowed with it has been termed the moving fibre. The voluntary and involuntary motions of the body are all dependent upon this principle. It is in consequence of it, that the muscular fibres of the heart, being stimulated by the blood flowing into its auricles and ventricles, are made to contract and to propel the blood. The same vital power in the voluntary muscles, being acted upon by the nervous fluid (whatever the nature of this may be) directed to them by the will, renders them obedient to its purposes. The vital power is the efficient cause, whilst the stimuli applied (as for example the blood flowing into the cavities of the heart, in the first instance, and the nervous fluid in the second) are only the exciting causes of muscular motion: for, where the vital power is destroyed, no motion can be excited in the muscular fibre, by any stimulus whatever.<sup>25</sup>

The above passage reflects some of the uncertainties of this approach. Milman is uncertain to what extent the 'principle inherent' is 'independent even of life', and he is noticeably unsure of the relation between 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' motions since he is not prepared to say anything of the nature of the 'nervous fluid' which, he claims, conveys the intentions of the 'will' to the muscles. Nevertheless, Milman uses this physiological structure to explain the nature of scurvy, first of all emphasizing the symptom of lassitude that had been observed by other writers. Milman remarks:

The paralysis in the scurvy has long been remarked to be of a peculiar kind, and seems to afford a strong instance of that sort of paralysis mentioned by Fontana, as depending on the destruction of the vital power in the muscle, and not upon any injury of the nerve going to it. The scorbutic paralysis has been distinguished

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25. F.Milman (B.C). pp. 60-63.



from such an affection depending on the nerves by this circumstance, "quod, licet robur et firmitae pereant membris affectis paralyti scorbutica, tamen in plerisque aliquis motus maneat et quidem per intervalla ille motus augeatur et minuatur denuo". The scorbutic paralysis easily gives way to remedies, whereas the paralysis from an injury of the nerves is a chronical obstinate complaint, not often cured.<sup>26</sup>

Still using Fontana as his authority, Milman concludes:

Fontana shows, that where the force of the muscular fibre is impaired, it is owing to an injury of that property of it, its vital power. He shows, that where the vital power is diminished, or destroyed, it is accompanied with a proportional weakness of the fibre, with a diminished cohesion between its particles, with a lengthening, and a soft lax state of it, and a great tendency to putrefaction. The same affections being conspicuous in the disease of which I am speaking, I think myself warranted in referring them to the same cause, and to conclude, that the scurvy is not a disease of the fluids, but of the solids; that its seat is in the muscular fibre, that its proximate cause consists in a gradual diminution of the vital power by the remote causes of this disease; that the torpor, weakness, etc. observed in all the functions, are the first effects of the proximate cause, the diminution of the vital power; and that the subsequent diminished cohesion between the particles of the muscular fibres, and the tendency of these to putrefaction, are links of the chain, and are ultimately derived from the same source.<sup>27</sup>

Milman's emphasis might seem to detach the physical condition of the individual from the physical universe, but within this emphasis cosmological connections were made as readily as in the bio-chemical approach.

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26. Ibid. pp. 98-99. Felix Fontana (1730-1805). Italian naturalist. *Biographie Universelle*. Vol. 14. pp. 334-336.

27. F. Milman (B.C). pp. 103-104.

Writing in 1765, Andrew Wilson,<sup>28</sup> whose work was later cited by the reputable Dr. Goodwyn,<sup>29</sup> comments:

But, if we consider the similitude between that activity subsisting in animal fibres and electricity, and consider, at the same time, that most animal substances are electrics per se; one can scarce miss concluding that the animal fibres and oils are electrics per se, in a state of electricity; that is having that power not only excitable in them, but they actually in the exertion of it, as really as a chrystal globe is during friction; tho' modified in a way and manner peculiar to living animals, nay, in many instances, remaining in their substance after death or a separation of parts: ...<sup>30</sup>

The bio-physical explanation of scurvy suggested a connection with electrical phenomena in the 'external' world as much as the bio-chemical explanation suggested a connection between health and atmospheric conditions.<sup>31</sup>

Avenues of medical investigation in the 1790's could be pursued indefinitely, but my main intention has been to show that within the two main types of empirical enquiry there lurked a common tendency towards systematisation. I have also wanted to indicate that the generalised theories of explanation, whether involving 'oxygen' or 'electricity' as a popular panacea, were used to describe distinct diseases and were also used

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28. Andrew Wilson (1718-1792) - 'philosophical and medical writer'. D.N.B. Vol. 62. pp. 76-77.

29. Edmund Goodwyn (1756-1829) - 'medical writer'. D.N.B. Vol. 22. p. 151. See (B.C).

30. A. Wilson. Short Remarks ... (B.C). pp. 65-66.

31. Both approaches suggested interpretations of the phenomenon of 'resuscitation', and both, therefore, contributed to the popularity of the Royal Humane Society, of which John Thelwall was a member.

as means to the solving of the central difficulty, which was the definition of the nature of 'life'. Precision and discrimination in diagnosis were still comparatively rare with the result that it was possible to seek to explain the cause of, for instance, scurvy or consumption with reference to either of the generalised theories, or, for that matter, with reference to a combination of the two. Milman's reference to 'scorbutic paralysis' indicates the way in which a link could be forged between scurvy and various kinds of spasms and fits, and behaviour which might signify mental disorder or instability. Just as easily, Coleridge might make connections between his reading about scurvy in the literature of voyages of discovery, his experience of the unwilling fits of Charles Lloyd, his knowledge of 'animal magnetism' and mesmerism or of Thelwall's 'animal vitality' as 'electric forces',<sup>32</sup> his understanding of theories relating degrees of 'life' or consciousness to a connection between the amount of oxygen in the body in diseased or healthy states and the amount of 'pure air' in the atmosphere, and his imagining of a mariner 'fixed' mesmerically on a wide sea, listless, in a coma, without the stimulus of a refreshing breeze. Coleridge would have been encouraged to make such links by the imaginative

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32. A reviewer of Thelwall's essay on Animal Vitality commented:

After examining different opinions respecting the vital principle, Mr. T. proposes to simplify this difficult and involved subject, by 'regarding man as differing from other animals rather in the extent than in the nature of his powers;' and by considering him, together with other inferior animals, 'as consisting of a simple organized frame, from the susceptibility and presence, or the non susceptibility, or absence of stimuli in which arises the whole distinction between the living body and the dead.' ... On the nature of the specific stimulus the author has given us but very little information. According to him, it is something however contained in the atmosphere, and probably the electrical fluid.

A.R. in The Analytical Review. Vol. XIX. July, 1794. pp. 265-266.

Dr. Beddoes who, writing in 1803, made the suggestive remark concerning epileptic patients that can end this section. In the third essay of 'Hygeia', Beddoes wrote:

Some experience an incessant restlessness, like that of the wandering Jew. In whatever place they may happen to be, they are seized with an irresistible desire of removing to another, where they hope to find comfort.<sup>33</sup>

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33. T. Beddoes. Hygeia: or Essays Moral and Medical, on The Causes affecting the personal state of our middling and affluent classes. 1802. p. 37.

PART III

'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere'

1798

'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere' 1798

I am a compleat Necessitarian - and understand the subject as well almost as Hartley himself - but I go farther than Hartley and believe the corporeality of thought - namely, that it is motion -. <sup>1</sup>

So much of Coleridge's letter to Robert Southey of December 11th, 1794, is familiar, but Coleridge continues:

Boyer thrashed Favell most cruelly the day before yesterday - I sent him the following Note of consolation.

'I condole with you on the unpleasant motions, to which a certain Uncouth Automaton has been mechanized; and am anxious to know the motives, that impinged on it's optic or auditory nerves, so as to be communicated in such rude vibrations through the medullary substance of It's Brain, thence rolling their stormy Surges into the capillaments of it's Tongue, and the muscles of it's arm. The diseased Violence of It's thinking corporealities will, depend upon it, cure itself by exhaustion - In the mean time, I trust, that you have not been assimilated in degradation by losing the ataraxy of your Temper, and that the Necessity which dignified you by a Sentience of the Pain, has not lowered you by the accession of Anger or Resentment.' - <sup>2</sup>

Two important points emerge from Coleridge's statement of belief and from his humorous exemplification of it. Firstly, Coleridge considers himself to be a 'compleat Necessitarian', and he implies that the completeness of his position is established by his belief in the 'corporeality of thought'. Secondly, Coleridge seems to accept that there is a direct relation between sense-impressions and behaviour, that the nature of sensible 'in-put' determines the nature of active 'out-put'. As we have seen, Coleridge was

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1. Griggs. 74. p. 137.

2. Griggs. 74. p. 137.



initially concerned with the relation between feeling and rational obligation, or between actions and thoughts. Southey was uninterested in integrating these two, but Coleridge insisted that thoughts had to be in tune with actions or they would eventually corrupt action. It was Coleridge's ideal that people should act freely without regulation, but he did not believe that knowledge how to act was innate. He therefore believed that it would be ideal if knowledge could be acquired by habit so that eventually the correct rational behaviour would occur without reference to rational authority. Whilst Southey believed in the continual confrontation of reason and feeling, Coleridge believed in the gradual effacement of reason. At this stage, 'habits' and feelings were the instruments of prior reasoning. The theorising about the Pantisocracy involved consideration of the transformation of a sense of duty into a feeling. It was necessary for Coleridge to believe that right thoughts could necessarily be eventually transmitted as right feelings. Several things happened to this position when Coleridge's thinking turned to the state of society in England and in France. With the gradual break-down of Pantisocratic theorising in 1795, a new position was forced upon Coleridge by his desire to defend the French Revolutionaries. In the Political Lectures, Coleridge argues that action should be 'bottomed on' principles - on thought, on mental activity, but he also wants to say that French Revolutionary activity - 'The Terror', was wrong even though the motivating principles were right. As a means of exhortation, Coleridge wants to say that action follows necessarily from thought, but as a means of defence he also wants to say that error can occur in the communication of thought to action. Although the framework of necessarianism remained dominant in Coleridge's Political Lectures of 1795, nevertheless a wedge was driven between thought and action by the introduction of the idea of error. To remedy this situation, Coleridge saw the need for

an obligation which was pre-rational. The enquiry shifted from an acceptance of the opposition between reason and feeling in controlling human behaviour to a discussion of the nature of the obligation which preceded either form of control. In the Political Lectures, Coleridge was still inclined to conclude that the best patriots were those who possessed a sense of the providential control of the whole of natural and human history, and who therefore acted in conformity with their conception of a rational system. Recourse to pre-rational authority was a recourse to religious sanction, but Coleridge immediately found that religion meant rational or natural religion and that the Divine Will was a projection of human desires. Priestley's conviction that human and Divine intentions coincided in desiring the happiness of creation is just one obvious example of the kind of religion to which Coleridge turned for moral authority. Two important points emerged in the Theological Lectures. First of all, it became speculatively possible for Coleridge to see himself as God, and, secondly, he came to consider a knowledge of God to be the product not of autonomous thought but of precursive energetic action. This was the logical result, on the one hand, of his thorough-going Unitarianism and historical elisions, and, on the other, of his rigorously protestant attitude towards the doctrine of atonement. Coleridge speculated theologically at this time, but part of his thinking involved a consideration of the function of such thought in controlling action. Articles in The Watchman pushed Coleridge further away from belief in rational thought as the basis of moral obligation. He came to see the wise ardour of his true patriots as not wise at all, but as dangerous because the commitment of the patriots was to their own reasoning. Instead, Coleridge emphasized the need for commitment to the being of God, and, socially, he saw the need for genuine responses to actual situations rather than for the attempted enactment of stereo-typed sympathetic responses.

Human benevolence depended on a genuine appreciation of human needs, and this actual commitment seemed to begin to assume the importance for Coleridge of the action which he had theoretically decided might be the necessary prelude to knowledge of God. However, Coleridge did not push himself towards social activity, to an enactment of his theory, but, instead, withdrew and continued to theorise - investigating the implications of action vicariously by reference to John Thelwall, and considering his new friend's secular ideas.

Thelwall believed that there did exist forces of energy in the universe which actively linked humans sympathetically without reference to language. Nevertheless, he had insufficient confidence in this naturalistic attitude. Instead, he argued that men should study the adaptation of the parts of Nature to the whole in order to deduce their role within that whole. Men should continually be active in trying to participate in the natural organic processes of the universe. Each failure in participation should be ignored and cast immediately into oblivion so as not to prejudice the possibility of again achieving a sense of unity with the universe. By this rational endeavour, Thelwall believed that the ontological unification could be achieved which, in any case, he partly believed to be a natural fact. Thelwall, too, was perplexed by the relation between 'things' and the description of 'things'. The achieved sense of unification was, for Thelwall, the base of moral behaviour.

By contrast, Coleridge believed that an incomprehensible Being could be felt as the creator and cause of Nature, and that a more sure base for moral behaviour was the unification of man with God rather than with Nature. God was absolute, whilst Coleridge suspected that Thelwall's organic nature was a human rationalisation. Equally, Coleridge did not think that Thelwall's commitment could be achieved by a series of rational efforts each of which

was wholly new and wholly isolated from its predecessor. Coleridge envisaged a cumulative understanding of God which was reached not wholly rationally. Thinking in the terms established by the lectures of 1795, Coleridge certainly theorised that an action must precede thought of God. I suggest that Coleridge used Thelwall's emphasis on a-moral action as a guide for the action which he saw as the instigator of a process leading towards knowledge. Equally, I suggest that Coleridge used Thelwall's vision of organic unity as a description of one stage in the progress towards unity with God.

Like Thelwall, and also like Priestley, Coleridge was uncertain of the relationship between natural processes and systematised descriptions of those processes. Thelwall had explored this problem with reference to the healing of Belmour in The Peripatetic, and, in the late part of 1796, Coleridge was forced to confront the problem in his actual dealings with Lamb and Lloyd. In the case of the Lambs, Coleridge tried to fuse two separate points. He claimed that Mary Lamb had been the unwilling agent of Divine providence in killing her mother. Her act was involuntary and she was, consequently, morally not responsible. Hence Coleridge adopted an attitude towards the origin of the deed, and, also, in his comments to Charles Lamb, he sought to present a positive attitude towards the suffering that the deed has caused. Coleridge attempted to see the suffering as of precursive value for Charles in order to lead him to 'Godlikeness'. We have only to join the act of Mary to the remorseful response of Charles to have the plight of the ancient mariner. But Coleridge was not content to describe a natural process of redemption from 'remorse' towards 'Godlikeness'. He was inclined to adapt this process to the description of Christian redemption that he found, notably, in Jeremy Taylor's accounts of the relationship between moral reform - contrition, and salvation. The psychological process is matched by

the orthodox Christian system, and an involuntary action is equivalent to an act of faith. At the same time, Coleridge was not able to see involuntary deeds definitely within a theological necessarian context. His observation of Charles Lloyd's fits of delirium and his knowledge of medical speculation in the period must have suggested that 'involuntary actions' may be necessary in a material physical universe as a result of bio-chemical or bio-physical connections, so that the language of Christian explanation becomes an optional addition rather than a parallel account of fact. Coleridge certainly wanted to believe that Lloyd's illness was the result of his false beliefs, principles, or thoughts, - in other words, his false mental attitudes, but Coleridge's attempt to transform these, although moderately successful, did not meet with success in curing the physical condition. It is difficult to know of the extent to which Coleridge was aware of contemporary developments in anatomy, but it is possible that he knew, through Beddoes, of the isolation of reflex action, of muscular motion independent of the will, which became publicly accepted shortly afterwards in the work of Bell and Magendie. It is certain that Coleridge was interested in mesmerism and animal magnetism, both of which theories emphasized the possibility of the transformation of personality or the cure of minds by physical means.

Coleridge was plagued by precisely the same questions as Priestley, notably the relation between facts and descriptions of facts. However, The Ancient Mariner can partly be explained if we see that Coleridge tried to stand aside as creator from the autonomous world of the mariner's voyage and point to the conflicting systems of things as they are and things as men think them to be. Priestley had tried to match the system inherent in things communicated by God with the system perceived by man, and had tried

to offer his different attempts at this goal as systematic structures to be appreciated by readers. By contrast, Coleridge offers to his readers a vision of disjunction and disparity. Coleridge's reader stands aside with the creator and watches the mariner's vain attempts at knowledge, and, at the same time, enters into the sufferings of the mariner until he feels that the detached first vision of the totality is itself in the same category as the illusions, delusions, deliria, nightmares, or visions of the character.

It is clear from these last comments that it is important to see the whole poem as a dramatic presentation and to follow the changes of temporal perspective, to see, in other words, the relation between fact and the historical or present description of fact. The third stanza reads:

But still he holds the wedding-guest -  
 There was a Ship, quoth he -  
 "Nay, if thou'st got a laughsome tale,  
 "Marinere! come with me".

Here we have three voices: the narrator slipping between the present tense of 'he holds' and the past tense of 'quoth he'; the ancient mariner himself recounting in the past tense; the wedding guest speaking in the present tense. The effect of the dramatic presentation in the opening stanzas of the poem is to convey the impression that some kind of mesmeric compulsion emanating from the mariner in the present causes the wedding-guest to listen to his tale. The sense of compulsion that the narrator describes in the following lines thus lends credence to the sense of compulsion which later emerges from the mariner's own account:

The wedding-guest sate on a stone.  
 He cannot chuse but hear:  
 And thus spake on that ancyent man,  
 The bright-eyed Marinere.

After this introduction, the mariner begins his tale:



The Ship was cheer'd, the Harbour clear'd -  
 Merrily did we drop  
 Below the Kirk, below the Hill,  
 Below the Light-house top.

The Sun came up upon the left,  
 Out of the Sea came he:  
 And he shone bright, and on the right  
 Went down into the Sea.

The tale begins tediously so that it is not surprising that the next two stanzas indicate that the wedding-guest is frustrated at missing the wedding for such an uninteresting account. However these opening stanzas of the mariner's narration convey an important point about the whole: the sense is immediately imparted that the mariner pays meticulous attention to detail. The disappearance from sight of the Kirk, the Hill, and the Light-house top is recorded with precise, not to say trite, concern, and the same is true of the account of the rising and the setting of the sun. This precision is maintained throughout the narration so that the mariner is still concerned to indicate that the Light-house top, the Hill, and the Kirk re-appear correctly in reverse order when he eventually returns to harbour. I want to suggest, therefore, that the mariner's account indicates that he is, at the time of re-telling his story, and was, at the time of the action which he describes, an accurate observer of phenomena.

The mariner also indicates the possibility of precise chronological differentiation when he describes the arrival of the albatross:

At length did cross an Albatross,  
 Through the Fog it came;  
 And an it were a Christian Soul,  
 We hail'd it in God's name.

It is not clear whether the 'as if' explanation of the nature of the albatross was given at the time of its appearance or whether it is a comment in the present, but the mariner does resolutely introduce the final line with 'We hail'd it' with reference to God's name. In other words, the mariner is attempting to give a factual account of the reactions of the crew,

attempting to describe human behaviour as objectively as he seeks to describe natural phenomena. Nevertheless, he is partly betrayed by the opening words of the stanza. From the outset, the words 'At length' convey the assumption that the albatross saved the ship, or at least, that the arrival of the albatross was of significance. In his narration the mariner slips into an ordering of his past experience with these opening words, but, otherwise, the account seeks to retain objectivity. The mariner continues:

The Mariners gave it biscuit-worms,  
And round and round it flew;  
The Ice did split with a Thunder-fit,  
The Helmsman steer'd us thro'.

The juxtaposition of the two parts of the stanza is tendentious, but the mariner does not assert that there was a causal connection between the hospitality of the crew towards the bird and the liberation of the ship from the ice. The mariner simply reports the sequence of events, and in reporting fully the phenomena which he observes he provides the data for various deductions of a causal nature. The account continues:

And a good south wind sprung up behind,  
The Albatross did follow;  
And every day for food or play  
Came to the Marinere's hollo!

In mist or cloud on mast or shroud,  
It perch'd for vespers nine,  
Whiles all the night thro' fog smoke-white,  
Glimmer'd the white moon-shine.

Again, the mariner does not assert that the albatross caused the wind to blow, but instead, he introduces the apparently inconsequential description of the 'white moon-shine'. The seeming inconsequentiality is significant for I want to argue that in his narration the mariner provides the material for two different causal explanations of his experiences, and that, further, he gradually adopts one explanation while being only dimly aware of the possibility of the other. Throughout his account the mariner feels compelled to describe the behaviour of the sun and the moon even though he

is unable to impose a meaningful pattern on their movements, whilst he soon finds the pattern of causality which involves the albatross a necessary and acceptable one. The uncertainty of the attitude towards the shooting of the albatross is apparent from the first presentation of the fact in the next stanza of the poem:

"God save thee, ancient Marinere!  
 "From the fiends that plague thee thus -  
 "Why look'st thou so?" - with my cross bow  
 I shot the Albatross.

Much has rightly been made of the fact that, mentioned in these bald terms, the shooting of the albatross appears to have been unmotivated and unpremeditated. Much has also been made of the sense that the shooting was a trivial deed to induce the degree of guilt and punishment that we find in the rest of the poem. However, my point simply is that the mariner eschews causal explanation with regard to motive and behaviour as much as with regard to external phenomena. He is only concerned to recount physical events, and the corollary of this concern is that every event is, in itself, independent of cause and, because independent of judgement, morally neutral. The shooting of the albatross, in other words, is described by the mariner as nothing more or less than the shooting of an albatross. The construction of the poem, however, fuses two distinct time perspectives. The mariner recounts the shooting of the albatross without elaboration, but the frightened interjections of the wedding-guest convey the impression that in the present moment of narration the mariner is filled with horror at what he now considers to have been a crime. The next few stanzas of the tale indicate that, at first, the interpretation of the nature of the deed was fickle. The mariner reports meticulously:

The Sun came up upon the right,  
 Out of the Sea came he;  
 And broad as a weft upon the left  
 Went down into the Sea.

And the good south wind still blew behind,  
 But no sweet Bird did follow  
 Ne any day for food or play  
 Came to the Marinere's hollo!

And I had done an hellish thing  
 And it would work 'em woe:  
 For all averr'd, I had kill'd the Bird  
 That made the Breeze 'to blow.

Ne dim ne red, like God's own head,  
 The glorious Sun uprist:  
 Then all averr'd, I had kill'd the Bird  
 That brought the fog and mist,  
 Twas right, said they, such birds to slay  
 That bring the fog and mist.

The shooting of the albatross clearly made no immediate difference to the fortunes of the ship. The south wind continued to blow, and the albatross was missed as a 'sweet Bird', an amusing companion, not as a bird of good omen. Nevertheless there were superstitious predictions and the mariner is inclined to accept the criminality of his action, in spite of the fact that the accusation that he had killed the bird 'That made the Breeze to blow' was manifestly false. The tenses used in the first two lines of that same stanza are interesting for they indicate that the mariner is not observing from his present position that he 'had done an hellish thing' but is presenting, in implicit reported speech, the sentiments of the other sailors. There was no evidence whatsoever to suggest that the deed had been 'hellish', and had not the idea been planted it would have lost its power as a possible causal explanation when the fortunes of the ship did suffer. Indeed, before the becalming, the sailors are prepared to praise the mariner for ridding the ship of the albatross.

The mariner now proceeds to describe the becalming of the ship. Again, his plain account provides material for an interpretation of events of which he is unaware:

All in a hot and copper sky  
 The bloody sun at noon,  
 Right up above the mast did stand,  
 No bigger than the moon.

The mariner's earlier simile for the sun - 'like God's own head', suggests a certain amount of symbolising activity on the part of the mariner, but he has only obscure intimations of a cosmic pattern. He finds more immediate explanations much more amenable and is prepared to accept the resurgence of the dormant belief in the causal significance of the albatross. He faithfully reports the sequence of events:

And some in dreams assured were  
Of the Spirit that plagued us so:  
Nine fathom deep he had follow'd us  
From the Land of Mist and Snow.

And every tongue thro' utter drouth  
Was wither'd at the root;  
We could not speak no more than if  
We had been choked with soot.

Ah wel-a-day! what evil looks  
Had I from old and young;  
Instead of the Cross the Albatross  
About my neck was hung.

The mariner describes the introduction of a new causal explanation. Some of the sailors dreamed that a Spirit was plaguing the ship. Although this interpretation gains credence, the mariner is still held responsible for the suffering of the crew and the albatross is hung around his neck instead of the cross. No connection has been established between the persistence of the evil spirit and the shooting of the bird, but the symbolic action of exchanging the albatross for the cross identifies the shooting with the crucifixion and so assigns the force of fact to the religious interpretation of events that had been fore-shadowed in the fact that the crew had 'hail'd it in God's name'.

The mariner's reference to the dreams of the sailors prepares the ground for the developments which take place in the rest of the poem. The mariner's account continues in Part III of the poem in the following way:

I saw a something in the Sky  
 No bigger than my fist;  
 At first it seem'd a little speck  
 And then it seem'd a mist:  
 It mov'd and mov'd, and took at last  
 A certain shape, I wist.

For the first time the mariner recalls a sense of doubt concerning the exact nature of the phenomena which he observed. The problem is now one of identification rather than of description. The mariner continues to describe the process of transition from perception to a conviction of identity:

A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!  
 And still it ner'd and ner'd;  
 And, an it dodg'd a water-sprite,  
 It plung'd and tack'd and veer'd.

With throat unslack'd, with black lips bak'd  
 Ne could we laugh, ne wail:  
 Then while thro' drouth all dumb they stood  
 I bit my arm and suck'd the blood  
 And cry'd, A sail! a sail!

It is clear that the mariner is disposed to interpret his perceptions in such a way that he can offer the hope of rescue which would cancel out the effects of his criminality. The reference to the water-sprites indicates that the mariner was inclined to understand the shape that he perceived as a source of salvation dodging the evil spirit that the mariner takes now to be fact. The mariner recaptures his own relief at the joy of the crew:

With throat unslack'd, with black lips bak'd  
 Agape they hear'd me call:  
 Gramercy! they for joy did grin  
 And all at once their breath drew in  
 As they were drinking all.

The climax of hope is reached in the next stanza:

She doth not tack from side to side -  
 Hither to work us weal  
 Withouten wind, withouten tide  
 She steddies with upright keel.

and then the mariner reports his foreboding:



The western wave was all a flame,  
 The day was well nigh done!  
 Almost upon the western wave  
 Rested the broad bright Sun;  
 When that strange shape drove suddenly  
 Betwixt us and the Sun.

And strait the Sun was fleck'd with bars  
 (Heaven's mother send us grace)  
 As if thro' a dungeon grate he peer'd  
 With broad and burning face.

With the mariner's present interjection in the second line of the second stanza we sense his slight awareness of the possibility of some sort of crime committed against the sun, but the main point I want to make here is that from this stage in the mariner's narration neither he nor we can be sure that the 'events' which are described are public events at all. The mariner continues to describe the 'ship' as if it had objectively visited his own ship, but there is no longer the conviction that the spectre vision is shared by all the crew in the way that the albatross was communally seen and accepted. The uncertain objective status of the spectre vision is emphasized by the lack of comment upon the event by the rest of the crew. The mariner himself makes no distinction between the events which relate to the spectre-ship and other events, but his tale leaves the lurking suspicion that he has described an hallucination of some sort and is unable to separate illusion from reality. The mariner recounts no horror in the crew at the spectre-ship. The other sailors simply respond out of a sense of frustrated hope. The mariner says:

With never a whisper in the Sea  
 Off darts the Spectre-ship;  
 While clombe above the Eastern bar  
 The horned Moon, with one bright Star  
 Almost atween the tips.

One after one by the horned Moon  
 (Listen, O Stranger! to me)  
 Each turn'd his face with a ghastly pang  
 And curs'd me with his ee.

Four times fifty living men,  
 With never a sigh or groan,  
 With heavy thump, a lifeless lump  
 They dropp'd down one by one.

Their souls did from their bodies fly, -  
 They fled to bliss or woe;  
 And every soul it pass'd me by,  
 Like the whiz of my Cross-bow.

In the last stanza, the mariner interprets death in terms of the passing of souls from the body and, conventionally, in terms of flight to Heaven or Hell, which indicates that he is adopting a Christian framework of meaning for life. The second two lines also indicate the mariner's imaginative ability to relate the events which he observes to his own crime. His conviction of guilt is now complete - reinforced by the curse that mistaken hope had earned him. The sequence of events would suggest that the other sailors cursed the mariner for arousing their momentary 'joy' and it is the mariner himself who sustains the significance of the shooting of the albatross.

At this point in the narrative, the wedding-guest once more intervenes:

"I fear thee, ancient Marinere!  
 "I fear thy skinny hand; so brown -  
 "And thou art long, and lank, and brown,  
 "As is the ribb'd Sea-sand.

"I fear thee and thy glittering eye  
 "And thy skinny hand so brown -  
 Fear not, fear not, thou wedding guest!  
 This body dropt not down.

The wedding-guest makes deductions from his observation of the 'skinny' hand of the mariner, but the mariner immediately comes to the central point of the guest's fear and assures him that he himself did not die. However, neither we nor the mariner can be certain of this assurance. The fear of the guest is valid and the mariner's assertion cannot be verified. The guest can only listen to the mariner's account of his sense-impressions and make whatever deductions that he may from them. After answering the

wedding-guest, the mariner continues his narration:

Alone, alone, all all alone  
 Alone on the wide wide Sea;  
 And Christ would take no pity on  
 My soul in agony.

Speaking from the present, the mariner interprets his past plight as one of estrangement from God. The sense that he is in need of forgiveness follows the conviction that has been gradually imposed upon him by circumstances that his deed was a sinful one. The mariner then describes his feeling of estrangement from the rest of humanity:

The many men so beautiful,  
 And they all dead did lie!  
 And a million million slimy things  
 Liv'd on - and so did I.

and he recalls that he felt the need to pray:

I look'd to Heav'n, and try'd to pray;  
 But or ever a prayer had gusht,  
 A wicked whisper came and made  
 My heart as dry as dust.

The mariner describes his inability to pray in conventional terms and he does not relate the failure of his prayerful intentions to his 'crime' in shooting the albatross but instead to the distraction of a 'wicked whisper'. I suggest that the feeling emerges that the appeal to heaven is not one which arises from the mariner's experiential sense of his dilemma which had already been expressed through his identification with 'slimy things', but is instead an appeal to a conventionally structured account of experience about which the mariner is confused and for whom it is in no way existentially meaningful. The appeal to heaven is a last resort and the inadequacy of prayer is seen conventionally since the reference to heaven has never touched the specific details of the mariner's guilt. Not only is the mariner's sense of the object of prayer vague in his mention of 'Heav'n', but his understanding of prayer itself is confused in that he is uncertain whether

he means prayer as a formulation of words emanating from conscious effort - 'and try'd to pray', or as an unconscious expression of pure being - 'or ever a prayer had gusht'. This distinction between two types of prayer highlights the distinction between the two sorts of attempt made by the mariner to understand his experience. However, a development has occurred in the poem. The mariner began by recounting his past experience as objectively as possible. In doing this he revealed the manner in which the reactions of the crew to the shooting of the albatross imposed an interpretation of that event which was not inherent in it that caused him to see himself as guilty of a crime which was responsible for the misadventures of the ship. The superstition of the crew not only imposed a sense of guilt on the mariner, but also by analogy and symbolic gesture planted a framework of orthodox Christian explanation. The mariner finds this framework congenial even though he does not understand its precise relation to himself. The force of this framework of explanation seems to increase through the mariner's account for the simple reason that the mariner is alone from Part III onwards. Therefore, the conflict between interpretation and actual experience that had external reference in the first two parts of the narrative in the conflict between the rationalisations of the crew and the neutrality of the described events themselves, becomes internalised so that we find, more acutely than before, a conflict between the mariner's present rationality, which is a progression from that imposed by the other sailors, and his desire to present an objective narration which does not even attempt to distinguish between mental and physical sensations. In other words, the corruption of plain historicity of 'Like noises of a swound' early in the poem, which was the imposition of a later experiential knowledge on an earlier experience, now becomes more corrupted as a prior rational imposition gradually seeks the status of experiential knowledge and is then,

as such, imposed in turn by the mariner on his earlier experience. Perhaps this mirrors the way in which, for Coleridge, a Hartleian psychological explanation of human development was reinforced by an orthodox Christian schema of redemption until that schema itself achieved the status of explanation.

Nevertheless, the mariner continues to attempt to describe phenomena faithfully and without imposed explanation. Shortly after the above stanza, he continues:

The moving Moon went up the sky,  
And no where did abide:  
Softly she was going up  
And a star or two beside

Her beams bemock'd the sultry main  
Like morning frosts yspread;  
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,  
The charmed water burnt alway  
A still and awful red.

Beyond the shadow of the ship  
I watch'd the water-snakes:  
They mov'd in tracks of shining white;  
And when they rear'd, the elfish light  
Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship  
I watch'd their rich attire:  
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black  
They coil'd and swam; and every track  
Was a flash of golden fire.

O happy living things! no tongue  
Their beauty might declare:  
A spring of love gush'd from my heart,  
And I bless'd them unaware!  
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,  
And I bless'd them unaware.

The self-same moment I could pray;  
And from my neck so free  
The Albatross fell off, and sank  
Like lead into the sea.

A sense of the significance of the movement of the moon emerges from these stanzas since the change in mood which leads to the blessing of the 'happy

living things' is introduced by reference to the moon's activity, but the mariner himself makes no attempt to explain the significance which his pre-occupation suggests. Instead, he is more concerned to analyse his feeling of release from guilt. Here, the mariner again grapples with the problem set by the two kinds of prayer that I have already mentioned. The mariner is quite conscious that his act of blessing was itself unconscious, and his use of 'gusht' and 'heart' once again places the act in the category of prayer of which he had previously found himself incapable. Importantly, the mariner then wishes to assign a cause for his 'unaware' behaviour. The account of the second two lines is followed by the interpretation of the third two lines, and the mariner explains the event by reference to 'my kind saint'. Whereas, before, 'Christ' had failed to take pity on the condition of the mariner, we now find that his 'kind saint' has become pitiful. The mariner's metaphysical references, in other words, are indiscriminate. In the next stanza, the mariner asserts that the ability to pray in one manner immediately enabled him to pray in the other, and he implies that the sinking of the albatross into the sea is an indication of the efficacy of prayer and a confirmation of forgiveness for his past deed.

The beginning of Part V of the poem sustains the impression that peace has been achieved. The mariner comments:

O sleep, it is a gentle thing,  
 Belov'd from pole to pole!  
 To Mary-queen the praise be yeven  
 She sent the gentle sleep from heaven  
 That slid into my soul.

The praise of 'Mary-queen' is a present interjection that again suggests that the mariner indiscriminately assigns theological responsibility for his salvation. However, the manner in which the mariner continues his account begins to suggest that it is perhaps premature to interpret the recent events as 'salvation'. If the 'guilt' of the mariner was artificially



induced, it is equally possible that the schema of 'redemption' which he imposes is also inapplicable. Certainly, as Professor Harding has mentioned, the sense of liberation at the end of Part IV is not sustained and is not at all conclusive.<sup>3</sup> It may be that the sense of the harmony of creation is not intended to be the climax of individual suffering but that, instead, it is an indication of the kind of organic unity which can be achieved at sudden moments. For Thelwall, such moments are to be continually sought, but, as we have seen, for Coleridge, they are only moments in a process which leads beyond unity with Nature towards unity with God. The mariner continues:

The silly buckets on the deck  
That had so long remain'd,  
I dreamt that they were fill'd with dew  
And when I awoke it rain'd.

My lips were wet, my throat was cold,  
My garments all were dank;  
Sure I had drunken in my dreams  
And still my body drank.

I mov'd and could not feel my limbs,  
I was so light, almost  
I thought that I had died in sleep,  
And was a blessed Ghost.

As in relation to external phenomena, so here there seems to be the possibility of a double interpretation of the mariner's experience. In the first stanza he simply records the juxtaposition of a dream of dew and the fall of rain and the use of the conjunction between the lines implies a causal connection between the two 'events', but the picture which emerges of the mariner here is of a man who is confused and unable to discern what parts of his 'experience' might be actual as opposed to traumatic. The mariner describes symptoms which would suggest that he had been in a fever,

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3. See D.W.Harding. Experience into Words. (B.Di). p. 54.

and yet he explains his condition by reference to his activity in a dream state whilst he is also only able to describe that state by analogy with waking experience - 'Sure I had drunken in my dreams'. The mariner is now as confused in his account of his own non-volitional behaviour seen from within as he had previously been in his account of the public reaction to the non-volitional shooting of the albatross. The mariner's repetition of 'Sure' enforces the impression that he is searching for certainty through a glass darkly. The third stanza above presents the mariner's attempt to describe the absence of sensation. In the first line the mariner records his lack of feeling and in the remaining lines he tries to define this state of non-feeling by analogy with an imagination of what it might feel like to be dead and to be a ghost. This last analogy is offered with such seeming factual force that it immediately plants the idea that the mariner may, after all, have 'dropt down'. It seems possible that Coleridge's description in this part of the poem is based on his observation of the physical condition of Charles Lloyd and on Lloyd's own attempts to describe his sensations. Coleridge must certainly have been aware that Lloyd was often not conscious of his actions and hence not responsible for them, and also that there was a disparity between his (Coleridge's) observation of events and Lloyd's attempted introspective accounts. Coleridge may have gained ideas from the symptoms of Lloyd's epilepsy, especially if Beddoes had already hinted at a similarity between the restlessness of an epileptic and the story of the Wandering Jew which was anyway in Coleridge's mind before writing The Ancient Mariner.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, Coleridge was tempted to see such non-volitional behaviour either as part of a divine plan in the

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4. See Note-books, particularly 45n.

manner of Mary Lamb's matricide, or as an instance of the spontaneous action which Thelwall recommended - the 'gush' from the 'heart' - as a means to physical integration with the universe. I argue that Coleridge took both the shooting of the albatross, and the 'gush' of love leading to a blessing 'unawares' of creation as non-volitional actions which physically fostered the development of the individual will and the process leading to its unity with the Divine Will.

After the account of his own sensations, the mariner now turns his attention to the physical events which affected the ship. He describes the advent of the roaring wind which affected the ship with its sound alone. He then moves into the historical present in his narrative and tries to describe the mysterious motion of the ship:

The coming wind doth roar more loud;  
The sails do sigh, like sedge:  
The rain pours down from one black cloud  
And the Moon is at its edge.

Hark! hark! the thick black cloud is cleft,  
And the Moon is at its side:  
Like waters shot from some high crag,  
The lightning falls with never a jag  
A river steep and wide.

The strong wind reach'd the ship: it roar'd  
And dropp'd down, like a stone!  
Beneath the lightning and the moon  
The dead men gave a groan.

They groan'd, they stirr'd, they all uprose,  
Ne spake, ne mov'd their eyes:  
It had been strange, even in a dream  
To have seen those dead men rise.

The mariner has recourse to simile to present the nature of the phenomena that he has observed, and his similes are drawn from the context of a country landscape - 'Like waters shot from some high crag'. The mariner draws on a mass of disordered prior experience in order to try to come to terms with the task of describing the amazing phenomena which he witnessed.

He remains naive before brute experience in that he does not try to establish any causal connection between the arrival of the wind and the re-vivification of the sailors, and the persistent alternative interpretation of events seems to be unconsciously expressed because it appeals to him melodramatically in a descriptive phrase such as 'Beneath the lightning and the moon'. It is this same melodramatic inclination of the mariner that encourages the feeling that all the events of the account are now dream-events when the mariner comments that 'It had been strange, even in a dream' to have seen the rest of the crew rise up again. Although the opening lines of Part V had suggested that the mariner was perhaps not fully aware of his own predicament, he now proceeds to describe the behaviour of the resurrected crew with self-confidence:

The helmsman steer'd, the ship mov'd on;  
 Yet never a breeze up-blew;  
 The Mariners all 'gan work the ropes,  
 Where they were wont to do:  
 They rais'd their limbs like lifeless tools -  
 We were a ghastly crew.

The body of my brother's son  
 Stood by me knee to knee:  
 The body and I pull'd at one rope,  
 But he said nought to me -  
 And I quak'd to think of my own voice  
 How frightful it would be!

The mariner observes the determined progress of the ship in relation to which the other mariners are seen as automata possessing no free-will. The mariner then proceeds to describe the manner in which sounds rose from the bodies of the other sailors, and he again is forced to use familiar descriptive language to come to terms with this new experience:

Sometimes a dropping from the sky  
 I heard the Lavrock sing;  
 Sometimes all little birds that are  
 How they seem'd to fill the sea and air  
 With their sweet jargoning.

And now 'twas like all instruments,  
 Now like a lonely flute;  
 And now it is an angel's song  
 That makes the heavens be mute.

It ceas'd: yet still the sails made on  
 A pleasant noise till noon,  
 A noise like of a hidden brook  
 In the leafy month of June,  
 That to the sleeping woods all night  
 Singeth a quiet tune.

At this point the wedding-guest once more intervenes:

Listen, O listen, thou Wedding-guest!  
 "Marinere! thou hast thy will:  
 "For that, which comes out of thine eye, doth make  
 "My body and soul to be still".

The comment of the wedding-guest is significant for it reinforces the impression of compulsion given in the opening stanzas of the whole poem, and indicates the materiality of mesmeric power in the 'actual' world at the very moment when a material compulsive force might seem to explain events in the world described by the mariner. In answer to the wedding-guest, the mariner affirms that his tale is of value and then returns to his account:

The Mariners all 'gan pull the ropes,  
 But look at me they n'old:  
 Thought I, I am as thin as air -  
 They cannot me behold.

The mariner's interjection 'Thought I' focuses attention on his interpretative frame of mind, and his conclusion gives the impression that his existence might be as spiritual as that of the other sailors. The mariner now turns his attention to the progress of the ship:

Till noon we silently sail'd on  
 Yet never a breeze did breathe:  
 Slowly and smoothly went the ship  
 Mov'd onward from beneath.

Under the keel nine fathom deep  
 From the land of mist and snow  
 The spirit slid: and it was He  
 That made the Ship to go.  
 The sails at noon left off their tune  
 And the Ship stood still also.

The sun right up above the mast  
 Had fix'd her to the ocean:  
 But in a minute she 'gan stir  
 With a short uneasy motion -  
 Backwards and forwards half her length  
 With a short uneasy motion.

The mariner records that the ship moved at first without wind and he at once assumes that the spirit of which some sailors had earlier been 'assured' was indeed propelling the ship. This assumption reaches a climax of causal assertion with 'and it was He / That made the Ship to go', but the mariner's continued account undermines that assertion. In a way that the mariner cannot explain, the motion of the ship seems to be connected with the motion of the sun. The mariner's comment that the sun, at noon, had 'fix'd' the ship to the ocean links its force with that of the mariner himself in holding the wedding-guest 'with his glittering eye'. This is a link of which the mariner is unaware because it is achieved by the fusion of the narration of the poem with the mariner's narration of his tale. The mariner continues his account in the following way:

Then, like a pawing horse let go,  
 She made a sudden bound:  
 It flung the blood into my head,  
 And I fell into a swoond.

How long in that same fit I lay,  
 I have not to declare;  
 But ere my living life return'd,  
 I heard and in my soul discern'd  
 Two voices in the air.

The mariner draws an analogy between the ship and a creature, and then he makes it explicit that he fell into a coma. For the first time he is prepared to accept that areas of his experience were not conscious. In the second stanza he therefore admits that he has no possible criterion whereby he can determine the length of his coma, but he remains confident that he is able to distinguish between the levels of his own consciousness. The mariner's use of 'living life' implies a distinction between consciousness



and unconsciousness, and after the account of his vision which follows he then confidently asserts that he 'woke'. The important account of the vision spans Parts V and VI of the poem. It begins:

"Is it he?" quoth one, "Is this the man?

"By him who died on cross,

"With his cruel bow he lay'd full low

"The harmless Albatross.

"The spirit who 'hideth by himself

"In the land of mist and snow,

"He lov'd the bird that lov'd the man

"Who shot him with his bow.

The other was a softer voice,

As soft as honey-dew:

Quoth he the man hath penance done,

And penance more will do.

The first voice which the mariner reports imposes an interpretation upon the past action of the mariner. The voice reinforces the interpretation that the mariner had come to accept. The reference to Christ makes an emotional connection between the death of Christ and the death of the albatross, and the mariner's bow is now specifically described as 'cruel' and the bird as 'harmless'. These last two emphases impose a gloss on the event which did not emerge at all from the mariner's earlier account. Earlier the shooting had not been especially cruel and the bird had not been especially harmless. In the second stanza, the reported voice continues to assert as fact elements that were before unspecified. The existence of the 'spirit' is now taken for granted, but the nature of its existence is unsure for he is here represented as living by himself in the land of mist and snow, and not as following the ship 'nine fathom down' from that land. This voice also asserts that the spirit loved the bird, and also that the bird loved the man, which, again, is not the relationship between bird and sailors that first emerged. However, it emerges that the first voice is ignorant in comparison with the second. The opening comment of the first voice had already planted

the impression that he is the lesser spirit. In asking 'Is this the man?' the first voice intimates that his knowledge of the facts of the mariner's situation is derived from hearsay and not from direct observation. It is the second voice - 'as soft as honey-dew' - that sounds the note of authority. His opening comment, given by the mariner in reported speech, is ambiguous. The second voice imposes the pattern of 'penance' on events but he gives no indication that he accepts the version of the 'crime' given by the first voice. The continuation of the dialogue shows that the second voice is concerned with a very different realm of causal connection:

## FIRST VOICE

"But tell me, tell me! speak again,  
 "Thy soft response renewing -  
 "What makes that ship drive on so fast?  
 "What is the Ocean doing?

## SECOND VOICE

"Still as a Slave before his Lord,  
 "The Ocean hath no blast:  
 "His great bright eye most silently  
 "Up to the moon is cast -  
  
 "If he may know which way to go,  
 "For she guides him smooth or grim.  
 "See, brother, see! how graciously  
 "She looketh down on him.

## FIRST VOICE

"But why drives on that ship so fast  
 "Withouten wave or wind?

## SECOND VOICE

"The air is cut away before,  
 "And closes from behind.  
  
 "Fly, brother, fly! more high, more high,  
 "Or we shall be belated:  
 "For slow and slow that ship will go,  
 "When the Marinere's trance is abated".

The first voice asks exactly what is happening - what are the causes of the events. The first voice is represented as having a received impression of what has morally happened without a precise understanding of the relation between the universe and its maker. The second voice, however, explains

that the ocean is as a slave before the moon. The eye of the ocean is cast on the moon, and the moon's compulsive influence is implied. The effect of this account by the second voice is to suggest a positive sense and significance for the descriptions of the sun and the moon offered by the mariner unconsciously. The implication of the second voice in the last stanza is that the spirits might themselves become becalmed by proximity to the ship when the mariner's trance abates. The more important implication, however, is that the speed of the ship is related to the physical state of the mariner. This sense of a physical interdependence that is unconscious and can only be effectual through the unconscious is also fostered by the reference to the ocean's 'great bright eye' which induces the sense, again, that a physical mesmeric force embraces both the universe described by the second voice and the 'actual' world of relation between the mariner and the wedding-guest. The second voice accentuates the interpretation of the mariner's experience which is only implicit in his own rational account. The conversation between the two voices dramatises the two interpretations that have always co-existed in the mariner's account. The description of the vision, therefore, establishes the coherence of the naturalistic, non-rational interpretation of events. This is not to say that the mariner's visionary dialogue establishes the truth of the second voice's interpretation. Coleridge uses the vision as a device for making clear the two interpretations to the reader without having to imply that both are equally clear to the mariner himself.

It remains important that the mariner is unaware of the coherence of the sun/moon imagery which has been established by the vision. He continues his account still in ignorance of the alternative explanation of his experience offered by the second voice:

I woke, and we were sailing on  
 As in a gentle weather:  
 'Twas night, calm night, the moon was high;  
 The dead men stood together.

The mariner is unable to relate the progress of the ship to the abatement of his trance as the second voice had done. All the mariner can do is report factually and by analogy, and he recognises that 'As in a gentle weather' is an 'as if' account but can do no more to explain the phenomenon of the ship's movement. In the third line, the mariner again mentions the moon, but he remains unaware of any specific significance and immediately turns his attention to the plight of the dead crew. He continues:

All stood together on the deck,  
 For a charnel-dungeon fitter:  
 All fix'd on me their stony eyes  
 That in the moon did glitter.

The pang, the curse, with which they died,  
 Had never pass'd away:  
 I could not draw my een from theirs  
 Ne turn them up to pray.

And in its time the spell was snapt,  
 And I could move my een:  
 I look'd far-forth, but little saw  
 Of what might else be seen.

The mariner still tries to relate his state of mind to the curse of the rest of the crew. The mariner sees the compulsion of their eyes as the factor which prevents him from turning his eyes heavenwards in prayer. Hence the mariner's urge to pray and to find forgiveness can be seen to persist long after the act of blessing of the 'happy living things'. In the next stanza the mariner sees the curse of the crew as a spell. In its time this spell was broken and the mariner describes how he was able to move his eyes. There is a confusion between the eye of vision and the eye of perception. In the previous stanza, eyes were required for prayer, but in the third stanza the mariner is conscious that his perception is restricted. This suggestion of restricted understanding is an admission of inadequacy and confusion on the

mariner's part. In the protracted simile which follows in the next stanza the mariner indicates, in his narrative, that fear and guilt contribute to the ignorance of which he now feels acutely conscious:

Like one, that on a lonely road  
 Doth walk in fear and dread,  
 And having once turn'd round, walks on  
 And turns no more his head:  
 Because he knows, a frightful fiend  
 Doth close behind him tread.

As the mariner continues his objective account he now becomes noticeably less willing to trust his visual perceptions, and he emphasizes other kinds of sensational evidence:

But soon there breath'd a wind on me,  
 Ne sound ne motion made:  
 Its path was not upon the sea  
 In ripple or in shade.

It rais'd my hair, it fann'd my cheek,  
 Like a meadow-gale of spring -  
 It mingled strangely with my fears,  
 Yet it felt like a welcoming.

Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,  
 Yet she sail'd softly too:  
 Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze -  
 On me alone it blew.

The description in the first stanza is, primarily, of the mariner's own sensation. The emphasis is upon 'on me' and the mariner goes on to indicate that the wind was discernible in no way other than by reference to personal direct sensation. It is as if the mariner is now aware that it is unwise to go beyond such sensation in interpretation. In the second stanza he is forced to describe the impact of the wind physically on his face by using a simile drawn from rural nature, but the remaining lines show that he is preoccupied with an analysis of his emotional as well as his sensational response. The mariner is prepared to admit that his emotion is 'strange' and he is explicit about his sense of fear. The caution of the mariner in moving from sensation to explanation is now emphasized by his reaction to

the first sight of what seems land:

O dream of joy! is this indeed  
 The light-house top I see?  
 Is this the Hill? Is this the Kirk?  
 Is this mine own countree?

We drifted o'er the Harbour-bar,  
 And I with sobs did pray -  
 "O let me be awake, my God!  
 "Or let me sleep alway!"

Here the mariner's account moves into the historical present. He is afraid that the view of his own country might be an illusion like the earlier appearance of the 'spectre-ship'. In the second stanza, the mariner's prayer reveals that his confusion between dream and reality is acute. On seeing his own country, he wishes the sight to be actual or wholly fantasy - not an uneasy mixture of the two. The mariner now proceeds to describe the bay into which the ship entered:

The harbour-bay was clear as glass,  
 So smoothly it was strewn!  
 And on the bay the moon light lay,  
 And the shadow of the moon.

The moonlight bay was white all o'er,  
 Till rising from the same.  
 Full many shapes, that shadows were,  
 Like as of torches came.

A little distance from the prow  
 Those dark-red shadows were;  
 But soon I saw that my own flesh  
 Was red as in a glare.

The mariner recounts his sense-impressions and, in so doing, he provides material for a possible interpretation of events which takes account of the role of the moon. In the third stanza, however, the mariner recalls a feeling of uncertainty whether he might not after all be in the same condition as the rest of the crew. The mariner is unable to be sure whether the redness of his own flesh is the same redness as that of the other sailors. The mariner describes the ensuing events in which a seraph-man arose and



stood over the corse of each sailor, and he describes the way in which the lights of the seraph-band function as signals to gain attention from the land. The mariner tells how he then heard the sound of oars:

Eftsones I heard the dash of oars,  
I heard the pilot's cheer:  
My head was turn'd perforce away  
And I saw a boat appear.

Then vanish'd all the lovely lights;  
The bodies rose anew:  
With silent pace, each to his place  
Came back the ghastly crew.  
The wind, that shade nor motion made,  
On me alone it blew.

The pilot, and the pilot's boy  
I heard them coming fast:  
Dear Lord in Heaven! it was a joy,  
The dead men could not blast.

I saw a third - I heard his voice:  
It is the Hermit good!  
He singeth loud his godly hymns  
That he makes in the wood.  
He'll shrieve my soul, he'll wash away  
The Albatross's blood.

After the first line of the last stanza, the mariner moves to the historical present tense in his account. In the last two lines the mariner sees the possibility of redemption through the hermit, and he uses the religious language of 'shrieve' and the Christ-like reference to 'he'll wash away / The Albatross's blood'. The mariner's belief in his need of redemption, in other words, still persists and he retains his conviction that the shooting of the albatross was a criminal act requiring forgiveness long after the symbolic absolution of the sinking of the albatross into the sea.

In Part VII of the poem, the mariner continues his account with a present aside describing the hermit, and he then moves back into his tale by recording the conversation of his rescuers as they rowed towards his ship:

The Skiff-boat ner'd: I heard them talk,  
"Why, this is strange, I trow!  
"Where are those lights so many and fair  
"That signal made but now?

"Strange, by my faith! the Hermit said -  
 "And they answer'd not our cheer.  
 "The planks look warp'd, and see those sails  
 "How thin they are and sere!  
 "I never saw aught like to them  
 "Unless perchance it were

"The skeletons of leaves that lag  
 "My forest-brook along:  
 "When the Ivy-tod is heavy with snow,  
 "And the Owlet whoops to the wolf below  
 "That eats the she-wolf's young.

"Dear Lord! it has a fiendish look -  
 (The Pilot made reply)  
 "I am afraid - "Push on, push on!  
 "Said the Hermit cheerily.

This recorded conversation validates the observation of the mariner in the mention of 'lights'. Once again the mariner is able to report an assessment of his situation which is not solely his own, and he describes the way in which the hermit immediately has to seek to explain the appearance of the ship by reference to his own prior visual experience. The implications of the hermit's description are imprecise, but the mention of the 'thin' and 'sere' obscurely suggests that the appearance of the ship to the hermit is not unlike the earlier appearance of the 'spectre-ship' to the mariner. However, this pattern remains dormant,<sup>5</sup> and the mariner continues his account:

The Boat came closer to the Ship,  
 But I ne spake ne stirr'd!  
 The Boat came close beneath the Ship.  
 And strait a sound was heard!

Under the water it rumbled on,  
 Still louder and more dread:  
 It reach'd the Ship, it split the bay;  
 The Ship went down like lead.

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5. This kind of suggestion gives the poem much of its eerie power. I favour H. House's reading of the whole poem except that I want to claim that the areas of mystery which House regards as aesthetically effective are that but are also philosophically significant.

Stunn'd by that loud and dreadful sound,  
 Which sky and ocean smote:  
 Like one that had been seven days drown'd  
 My body lay afloat:  
 But, swift as dreams, myself I found  
 Within the Pilot's boat.

The mariner recalls his own silence and motionlessness but he is unable to offer an explanation of his behaviour, except, in the third stanza, by analogy with the experience of dreams. Earlier the mariner had sought to explain dream experience by reference to 'actual' life, but the situation is now reversed, and in the present he is only conscious that he was conveyed unconsciously to the Pilot's boat. The mariner then proceeds to describe the terror of the pilot and the pilot's boy - a description which breaks down the barrier between the world of the tale and the world of the poem by establishing a likeness between the reactions of the wedding-guest and the frightened boy, until he is able to conclude:

And now all in mine own Countree  
 I stood on the firm land!  
 The Hermit stepp'd forth from the boat,  
 And scarcely he could stand.

"O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy Man!  
 The Hermit cross'd his brow -  
 "Say quick", quoth he, "I bid thee say  
 "What manner man art thou?"

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrench'd  
 With a woeful agony,  
 Which forc'd me to begin my tale  
 And then it left me free.

The mariner begged to be shriven, but he recounts how he was forced to begin his tale. Almost incidentally the mariner remarks that the telling of the tale left him 'free'. The freedom which is acquired in this manner is not regarded as significant by the mariner. Addressing the wedding-guest, the mariner elaborates:

Since then at an uncertain hour,  
 Now oftimes and now fewer,  
 That anguish comes and makes me tell  
 My ghastly aventure.

I pass, like night, from land to land;  
 I have strange power of speech;  
 The moment that his face I see  
 I know the man that must hear me;  
 To him my tale I teach.

The mariner is conscious that he has 'strange power of speech', but he sees this power in relation to others and not to himself. He sees the telling of his tale as an activity which teaches others. Nevertheless, he has given sufficient factual detail to encourage the deduction which he does not himself make that the telling is therapeutic and that it is through the telling of his tale alone that his sense of guilt is removed and he is temporarily shriven. The mariner's account of his present experiences is as inadequate as his account of those of the past, and, even in the present, he continues to provide a rational explanation for his behaviour at the same time as he presents the data for an alternative interpretation. In the summary of the voyage which the mariner now gives to the wedding-guest we see the fusion of his interpretation of the function of the tale with his interpretation of what had actually occurred to him, and in both interpretations he continues to rationalise the irrational forces which he has witnessed and still does witness in the present. The mariner's peroration is stimulated by the noise from the wedding feast. He says:

What loud uproar bursts from that door!  
 The Wedding-guests are there;  
 But in the Garden-bower the Bride  
 And Bride-maids singing are:  
 And hark the little Vesper-bell  
 Which biddeth me to prayer.

O Wedding-guest! this soul hath been  
 Alone on a wide wide sea:  
 So lonely 'twas that God himself  
 Scarce seemed there to be.

O sweeter than the Marriage-feast,  
 'Tis sweeter far to me  
 To walk together to the Kirk  
 With a goodly company

To walk together to the Kirk  
 And all together pray,  
 While each to his great Father bends,  
 Old men, and babes, and loving friends,  
 And Youths, and Maidens gay.

Following from the first stanza above, the mariner talks about his 'soul' and sees his isolation at sea as an isolation from God. It is the loneliness that the mariner emphasizes. He does not at all draw attention to the fact that mysteriously he was preserved and brought home. The reference to the absence of God, in the second stanza, is still incongruous, as was the reference to prayer in the mariner's account of the voyage. These stanzas represent the climax of the mariner's desire, first aroused by the superstition of the other sailors, to assimilate his experience to an orthodox Christian framework of explanation. In his account of the voyage, the mariner shows himself to have been concerned with his own inability to pray and to have been only interested in the persons to whom prayer might be directed as objects of substanceless invocation - 'Christ', 'my kind saint' or 'Mary-queen', rather than as possible moral agents. However, influenced by the context of church-attendance, the mariner now wishes to impose an explanation upon his past feeling so that he can recommend the value of church-going as a social custom to the wedding-guest. The mariner says that 'God himself / Scarce seemed there to be', and yet at no earlier point in his account had he given the impression that this seeming absence of God had been a meaningful description of his condition. The mariner imposes this interpretation of his past experience because he wishes to argue that worship of God provides the only redemption from his past guilt and suffering. The mariner wishes to reduce his experience to fit a simple formula which can argue that commitment to God cancels out the effects of alienation from Him. However, this simple rational formula is inadequate, and the mariner has continually provided enough material for it to be deduced that the shooting

of the albatross was never 'guilty', was never a 'sinful' deed that is now 'redeemed' through faithful commitment to God, but was, instead, a non-volitional act about which rational explanations accrued, inducing a sense of guilt which is now temporarily removed by the non-volitional re-telling of the tale. Linguistic explanations and religious worship, in other words, are both expedient fictions. It remains possible that man is a material agent in an universe which has purpose because of the intention of the Divine First Cause, or, equally, man may be immaterial in a world of spirits, but the important point here is that there are two levels of systematic ordering. There are two worlds - one of pre-ordained fact, which is the system of God, and the other of interpreted fact, which is the system of man.

The mariner is anxious to communicate the message that he has learnt from his experiences and from his interpretation of those experiences. His homilectic intention becomes overt in the two stanzas which follow:

Farewell. farewell! but this I tell  
 To thee, thou wedding-guest!  
 He prayeth well who loveth well,  
 Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best who loveth best,  
 All things both great and small:  
 For the dear God, who loveth us,  
 He made and loveth all.

The First Voice had insisted that the 'spirit' had 'lov'd the bird', and the Second Voice had drawn attention to the relationship between the functioning of the Moon and the Ocean, but the mariner now asserts that it is 'the dear God, who loveth us' and he seizes on the one point that he grasped from the blessing of all living things, that love precedes prayer, to construct a simplistic philosophy of life for the benefit of the wedding-guest. These lines do not contain the message of the poem but are placed in the poem as the message that the mariner himself struggled to deduce from his experience.



After these words, the narrator of the poem concludes:

The Marinere, whose eye is bright,  
Whose beard with age is hoar,  
Is gone; and now the wedding-guest  
Turn'd from the bridegroom's door.

He went, like one that hath been stunn'd  
And is of sense forlorn:  
A sadder and a wiser man  
He rose the morrow morn.

The last stanza brings out the point that the impact of the tale is not rational. It would, perhaps, be too much to read 'And is of sense forlorn' as meaning that the guest is stripped specifically of his faith in 'sense impression', but the point must be that the wedding-guest does not at all come away from his experience 'educated' or 'taught' by the rational 'message' that the mariner imparts.

The narration presents a relationship between the guest and the mariner which is one of physical mesmerism. The guest's attention is held physically, and not held by the content of the tale. Similarly, the mariner recounts a historical situation in which he was physically compelled to act in certain ways, even though in the course of his actions he created a language of description for these actions which he now considers to constitute an adequate explanation of the events which impinged upon him and of his own deeds. It would require discussion of the ballad form of The Ancient Mariner to decide to what extent the reader of the poem is mesmerised, or, at least, restrained in his rationality by the rhythm of the verse. Perhaps the reader finds that at the end of the poem he is 'of sense forlorn' and is able to identify himself, finally, with the wedding-guest. But I suggest that the reader may finally be as detached from the whole incident as is the narrator. The reader not only responds to the tale of the mariner but also to the relation between the phenomena of the tale and of reality intimated by the narrator. It is open to the reader to question

the physical causal relationship established by the narrator as much as the orthodox Christian linguistic causal relationships accepted by the mariner in his tale and eventually in reality. The reader is first able to see the explanation of the mariner as a fiction, and is then, secondly, allowed to consider the possibility that the structure of the whole poem is an artifice of the same kind as the mariner's. The reader may consider the disparity between the nature of things and the naive, honest, persistent strivings of the mariner towards comprehension, but he may also consider the total disparity between man's actual condition and his feeble understanding of it, and here the imitative world of the whole poem is not meant to escape censure. Coleridge's scepticism does not yet make an exception for art. The poem, like the mariner's momentary vision, is one stage in the progression towards absolute unity with God. For Coleridge, the poem is one moment of knowledge for a man who is perpetually metaphysically curious, perpetually not 'capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.'<sup>6</sup> This perpetual restlessness is a disease - one which causes fever and nightmarish delusion and irresponsible behaviour, as much as and comparably with the disease of Mary or Charles Lamb or Charles Lloyd. Both diseases are similar in that persons do not act in the ways in which they choose, and in that their thoughts engage less with realities than with self-deceptions. Equally, this perpetual restlessness is like a thirst - like the symbolical thirsting of the children of Israel for communion with God mentioned by Jeremy Taylor. But what relation does that kind of symbol bear to

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6. John Keats to George and Thomas Keats. December 21, 1817.  
Letters of John Keats. (selected and edited S. Gardner).  
 London. 1965. p. 68.

Coleridge's own development? Is it as superfluous as the mariner's own language of redemption? Part of the problem of the poem is that Coleridge begins as poet from the position which is the ideal culmination of the mariner's development as a person. Ideally, Coleridge is describing the progress in human development to the position which is now his and which specifically allows him to survey such a development. Rationally, Coleridge may have thought himself into unity with an omniscient Deity, but although, as poet, Coleridge is able to stand aside from his creation with God-like detachment, he attempts to describe from this detachment the progress of an individual towards the Godlikeness which is a necessary base for his own aesthetic stance. As the detached presentation of the mariner's fate advances, so the scepticism concerning the progression towards Godlikeness of the mariner inevitably undermines Coleridge's confidence in his stance as poet. The scepticism about the mariner must cause there to be scepticism about the poem itself. Progressively the poet is dethroned so that, for all its sophistication, the poem cannot be offered as of greater moral value than the homily of the mariner, and the poet may be deluding himself as much as his character (either as the result of physical ill-health, or as the result of the adoption of a false schema of explanation) if he thinks that his tale is able to communicate any rational 'message'.

PART IV

Four Critics of Coleridge

### Introduction

At the end of Coleridge as Critic, Sir Herbert Read commented:

It had been very tempting - it still is tempting - to assign to art a teleological function. Schelling, in his earlier works, had not hesitated to do this - to make art the copula or connecting link between transcendental being and human consciousness - only in the work of art could man make an objective representation of the nature of the supreme reality. But that, as Coleridge and indeed Schelling himself were quick to perceive, would lead to an identification of the moral and the aesthetic. I personally believe that that identification is still possible, but for Coleridge, as later for Kierkegaard, there was inherent in the human situation an ineluctable Either/Or. For Coleridge a 'standpoint', or a 'starting-post' as he called it, was a psychological necessity - a knot must be tied in the thread before we can sew, as Kierkegaard expressed it; and Coleridge, at an early age, had made his standpoint the Christian revelation. He had a horror of any kind of self-consistent system - that seemed to him merely a dialectical trick, a mechanical top spinning in nothingness, not touching the human heart.<sup>1</sup>

I have attempted to describe Priestley's endeavour to create a 'self-consistent system' from a conjunction of 'Christian revelation' and natural science. It is, perhaps, too easy to assert that Coleridge had made his standpoint the Christian revelation from an early age, but, certainly, Coleridge's theological convictions were independent of, or antecedent to, the rational apologetic of Priestley which initially attracted him. Whilst Coleridge's convictions may have been reinforced partially by Priestley's systematic presentation, he seems to have been always conscious of a gulf between rationalisation and intuitive certainty. At the same time, Coleridge wanted himself to place a rational veneer on dangerously bare

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1. H. Read. Coleridge as Critic. (B.Di). p. 31.

intuition. I have traced the concurrent progress of Coleridge's own rational account of the stages leading to 'Godlikeness' and of his scepticism concerning it. I have interpreted The Ancient Mariner as a poem which both presents a system and also implies that the system does not touch 'the human heart'. The poem suggests this dual response - both in relation to the understanding of the mariner and in relation to the wider understanding which it offers as a poem. In this latter relation, in other words, Coleridge was aware of a possible separation of the aesthetic as much as of the philosophically or theologically systematic from the moral. Coleridge, therefore, had as much horror of aesthetic autonomy as of systematic self-consistency.

As Head rightly remarks, it still is tempting 'to assign to art a teleological function'. All interpretation of literature must assume a theory of literature, and I have tried to describe a process of 'double-integration' leading to the formation of a poem. In this concluding Part, I shall briefly examine the work of four critics of Coleridge, namely, Professor D.W.Harding, Professor George Whalley, Professor D.G.James, and Dr. J.B.Beer. In differing ways, these critics have not recognised Coleridge's aesthetic scepticism, either because they have themselves adopted different aesthetic attitudes or because they have sought to adapt the attitudes of Coleridge to suit Twentieth century needs. These critics are systematisers of a sort, and, to some extent, propagandists, and it is important to see the relation between implicit theory and interpretation so as to imitate Coleridgean scepticism with regard to their systems and also, by comparison, with regard to my own systematically selective description.



## CHAPTER I

D.W. Harding

Harding reveals his central interest in the foreword of 'Experience into Words', where he writes:

The essays brought together here deal with the relation between the writer's words and some other, non-literary experience, whether his or his reader's.<sup>1</sup>

The danger of which Harding seems unaware in his version of this approach, is that 'non-literary' becomes equated with psychologically-interpreted experience. Harding's account of experience, in other words, is a current psychological one. He does not much countenance other formulations of experience which might have bearing on the words which exist in poems. This form of reductionism is most clear in Harding's brief remarks on Cowper's 'The Castaway'. He writes:

Some of the materials of the poem, it is true, may well have more obscure symbolic significance, the sea itself, for example. And there may be some doubt whether the calamity Cowper was referring to was his eternal damnation or his inevitable relapse into madness; we might perhaps say that he was unwittingly telling himself the truth, that his madness and only his madness was his damnation.<sup>2</sup>

However much the psychological interpretation of Cowper's sense of damnation may be the 'truth', it remains the case that Harding deliberately calls into question the general religious context within which Cowper tried to explain his own experience. In so doing Harding distorts the experience the transformation of which into words he is purporting to be examining. The significant point is that Harding attempts to impose an a-historical form on

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1. D.W.Harding. Experience into Words. (B.Di). p. 9.

2. Ibid. p. 76.

all historical experience without taking into account the possibility that the ways in which experiences are described by experiencers determine, or certainly modify, the nature of those experiences. There is, for instance, the possibility that Coleridge's own account of his experience is distorted by the following reading of The Ancient Mariner:

The essence of the poem is a private sense of guilt, intense out of all proportion to public rational standards. The supernatural machinery of the poem allowed Coleridge to convey something of this - for the small impulsive act which presses a supernatural trigger does form an effective parallel to the hidden impulse which has such a devastating meaning for one's irrational, and partly unconscious, private standards. It is a fiction that permits the expression of real experience.<sup>3</sup>

Without asserting that this is a false picture of Coleridge's experience, the problem which arises is this: what, for Harding, is the status of Coleridge's intellectual formulation of the theory that a motiveless act of faith is a necessary precursor of knowledge of God? I suggest that Harding is not sufficiently interested in how the expression of experience in various contexts - political or theological, for instance - might present modifications of experience which then become transferred to the poem so that it is not so much a direct expression of 'psychological' or 'real' experience as the manipulation of words that have already been applied in other contexts. Harding's emphasis is too individual, supposing a relation between an absolute self and the poem, and it does not allow for the existence of autonomous sets of associations of words or thoughts which, having attained independence by projection from the self are then re-assimilated with it in such a way as to partially re-constitute it.

When Harding proceeds to discuss the work of Maud Bodkin,<sup>4</sup> he comes

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3. Ibid. p. 59.

4. See M. Bodkin. (B.Di).

close to meeting my objection:

The literary question is how far it is profitable to come to a work of art with ideas drawn from other sources as to the significance of the symbols we are going to meet with. To some extent we must do this, some symbols being well-established parts of our cultural background. Voyaging into strange seas, for instance, the starting point of Coleridge's poem, has conventional implications and echoes that no one is likely to miss and that the poet would count upon in his readers. We can go a little farther, and usefully perhaps, with Maud Bodkin in noticing that wind and calm are, as she says, 'symbols of the contrasted states he (Coleridge) knew so poignantly, of ecstasy and of dull inertia'. It seems doubtful, though, whether we are much helped at this point by reminders of the uses to which the symbol of wind has been put in other literature; it may perhaps enrich our emotional associations to Coleridge's wind and calm, but on the whole the emotional value of these natural events seems to be sufficiently conveyed by the context of the poem alone without going far beyond it to wider literary contexts.<sup>5</sup>

However, Harding continues to ignore the intermediary context, to deny that there may exist wider literary contexts which are known to the poet and which form a part of his experience. Harding is ignoring the possibility that the symbols of the 'collective unconscious' may, as he later suggests in opposition to Jung,<sup>6</sup> be described in terms of the conscious. It seems that in his anxiety to focus the attention of the modern reader solely on the text of a past poem so that accretions of interpretation do not obliterate its historic 'objectivity', Harding also wishes to suppose that, in creation, the poem becomes an 'object' to the poet himself. The poet can only feel obscurely satisfied with his achievement and has a no greater sense of his 'intention' than does a modern reader. Harding writes:

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5. D.W.Harding. Experience into Words. (B.Di). p. 69.

6. Ibid. p. 194.

If we accept the views of depth psychology we have to consider the likelihood that much of the poem has a symbolic significance that the writer was not fully aware of and certainly did not circumscribe and focus sharply as the writer of an allegory or parable does. ... But still he must be given the credit and the responsibility for what is there in the poem and what it does to the reader. He was content, for reasons that may not have been fully conscious, to him, to leave the poem as it stands, and this is the poem he wanted us to read. We are face to face with what he actually said, not with what he could have consciously described as his intentions.<sup>7</sup>

Harding does not succeed in answering the Jungians. Instead he transfers the area of conflict from the 'intention' to the 'satisfaction' of the poet. Since both are considered to be partly unconscious, the words of the poem can still, on Harding's new ground, be interpreted by reference to a 'collective unconscious'. There is, indeed, a point at which the whole of experience can be explained in terms of the 'collective unconscious' such that distinctions between 'subject' and 'object', 'individual' and 'traditional' experience,<sup>8</sup> completely disappear. In order that there should be meaningful communication, however, an isolation of conscious from unconscious must be made. This, I think, is W.K.Wimsatt's meaning when he writes:

There is a gross body of life, of sensory and mental experience, which lies behind and in some sense causes every poem, but can never be and need not be known in the verbal and hence intellectual composition which is the poem. For all the objects of our manifold experience, for every unity, there is an action of the

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7. Ibid. p. 71.

8. I am deliberately connoting T.S.Eliot. (B.Dii).

mind which cuts off roots, melts away context - or indeed we should never have objects or ideas or anything to talk about.<sup>9</sup>

Wimsatt, of course, is answering J.L.Lowes and not the Jungians, and he slightly begs the question in assertively differentiating between 'sensory and mental experience' and 'verbal and hence intellectual composition'. Wimsatt's 'and hence' exposes him since it is precisely the interest in the non-intellectual character of language which has developed since Wimsatt's essay in the work of, for instance, S.K.Langer<sup>10</sup> that has caused Harding's dilemma.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Wimsatt does valuably draw attention to the fact that some differentiation is inevitable. If it is not made between Wimsatt's polarities, whatever they may mean, where should it be made? Either it has to be admitted that the poem is the poet's experience, which, clearly, Harding is not prepared to do because this admission must imply, in fact, that the poem is the experience of the reader, so destroying historical objectivity, or some differentiation must be made between poem and experience.

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9. W.K.Wimsatt. "The Intentional Fallacy". (B.Dii) p. 12.

10. See S.K.Langer. (B.Di). Chapter 2. Speculations on the Origins of Speech and its Communicative Function.

11. It could be added also, in passing, that Wimsatt was here shadow-boxing with Lowes, since the 'experience' that Lowes described was 'intellectual' and hence, perhaps, admirably suited for transference to an 'intellectual' composition. It was precisely because Lowes' idea of experience was not psychological - if that is the same as 'sensory and mental' - that Harding finds his interpretation of The Ancient Mariner inadequate.

Quite simply, so it would seem, it 'experience into words' is to be discussed it must be made quite clear what is meant by both 'experience' and 'words'. Harding tries to differentiate by recourse to levels of consciousness, but his attempt is unsuccessful partly because it is insufficiently comprehensive. I wish to suggest, in other words, that Harding's current psychological account of the experience which goes into words is weak because he assumes a distinction between words in poems and words in other contexts. Harding falls back on a differentiation between Art and Life. The title of his book should, truly, have been 'Experience into Poems', but the book which, with more comprehensiveness, could have been written, would have been entitled 'Experience into Words into Poems'.

I shall indicate that I suspect that Dr. Beer would want to argue that the subconscious intention which Harding sees at work in the formation of poetry was active in all Coleridge's experience. Beer, I think, would want to claim that all Coleridge's words were, in this sense, poetic. Harding, with difficulty, retains a distinction between Art and Experience, whilst, perhaps, Beer is inclined to see all Experience as Art. I share Harding's desire to retain some kind of dualism, and I think this desire can be supported by a limited acceptance of the comprehensive view which is implicit in Beer's writing. Accepting that 'experience' is the sum of, amongst many other things, all words used and all actions taken, I wish it to be taken as my premise that I am wanting to look at the relation between words in poems and those words in other contexts which both contribute and also try to give meaning to the whole 'experience'.



## CHAPTER II

J. B. Beer

Dr. Beer's attitude towards poetry emerges from the concluding remarks of Coleridge the Visionary. He writes:

His constant insistence upon the role of imagination in human life and happiness is an insistence upon the one human faculty which has been patronized by a scientific age, but which still gives us constant reminders of its importance and of the deadly consequences which follow its neglect.<sup>1</sup>

The significant point is that Beer clearly regards imaginative life as an activity, and he sees imagination as a faculty which needs to be continuously effective in life and not as one that produces artefacts which can be set in opposition to life as a criticism of it. A little earlier Beer makes this point more forcefully and implies a dissatisfaction with a life/art dualism:

In all these ways, Coleridge has been criticized by life, and we have seen how all these excellencies are to be found in his poetry by the sympathetic critic. Nevertheless, when we try to find Coleridge himself, we do not see, first and foremost, any of the figures which have been projected for our attention. We see instead a man who tried to take as his sphere all human experiences, whether in the world of measurable sense-perception or in the universe of the imagination, and to harmonise it into a single pattern. In this man, the shaping spirit and the inquiring spirit were equally strong, and he was never happier than when exercising both to the limit of their powers. If the life by which we are to judge poetry is the life of external sense-experience, he was at fault to do so: but if that life is to include all the shapings of the human imagination as well, then his poetry not only criticized life, but is criticized by life to its advantage.<sup>2</sup>

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1. J.B.Beer. Coleridge the Visionary. (B.Di). p. 295.

2. Ibid. p. 278.

Beer assigns a high status to imaginative activity because it synthesizes a broad sweep of internal and external experience so that it shows an extended reality and is able to criticize ordinary life. He is not at all saying, as I shall show that Professor Whalley does, that poetry reveals reality, but is simply arguing that the poet does justice to a fuller sense of what reality might be. The imagination of the poet does not 'body forth' reality. On the contrary, a new sense of 'life' and 'reality' is created by the imagination. Beer's implication is that 'facts of mind'<sup>3</sup> are as significant parts of reality as other facts.

Although I accept entirely Beer's emphasis, in contrast to that of Harding, that Coleridge's imaginative activity was engaged with the whole of experience with the result that no distinction can be made between 'experience' and imaginative creation, my central objection to Beer, as it was also an objection to Harding, is that he does not sufficiently allow for the ineluctably 'given' quality of much of experience. It seems that Beer is inclined to view poetry as a form of 'mythopoeic' or, as Miss Sewell<sup>4</sup> calls it, 'post-logical' thought to such an extent that this 'standpoint' prevents him from seeing the possibility that such a form of creative thinking was, for Coleridge, in conflict with a received idea of Christian truth.

At first sight it does not appear that Beer is at all likely to ignore any tension in Coleridge's position. Early in his book he answers Potter<sup>5</sup> in the following way:

To make a Jekyll and Hyde of Coleridge, however, is to under-rate his sensitivity and range - and Potter himself half acknowledges this in an appendix to his book. In particular, it leads to a

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3. See Griggs. 156. p. 260.

4. See E. Sewell (B.Di.).

5. See S. Potter (B.Di.).

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dichotomy between Coleridge the poet and Coleridge the religious thinker which involves a total misunderstanding of his position, and which has yet been encouraged in the work of some of his most sympathetic commentators.<sup>6</sup>

I could not agree more fully with this reaction to Potter's book. It begins to seem, therefore, that I depart from Beer mainly in my understanding of 'religious thinker'. This becomes clearer when, in his summary of Coleridge's achievement, Beer rightly draws attention to the limitation imposed by Coleridge's theological assumptions:

The attempt to find Truth, and thus create a complete poetic universe, is a more complicated issue, for here Coleridge was limited, far more than in the other cases, by the biblical-visionary world in which he had grown up. Again and again, he was haunted by the hope that that world would be vindicated.<sup>7</sup>

By eliding 'biblical' and 'visionary' Beer is implying that the Bible was, for Coleridge, an over dominant source book for personal mythopoeic thinking, whereas I wish to suggest that a belief in a Hebraic God, if not in the 'truth' of the Bible, had an impersonal quality which, certainly for the period leading up to 1797, called into question the value of imaginative activity.

My objection to Beer can be succinctly expressed either by saying that he sees Coleridge as too Platonic or by saying that he sees him as too much like Blake. With regard to the first instance Beer writes:

Coleridge at his most creative period, moreover, was not merely the poet. At such times, his questing self also came to the fore. His 'disquisitive mind' was devoted to the pursuit of knowledge - knowledge sought, not merely for the sake of writing poetry, but in conviction that ultimate truth was itself a poetic harmony. It

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6. J.B.Beer. Coleridge the Visionary. (B.Di). p. 27.

7. Ibid. p. 286.

is this dialectic within him between the angelic creator and the pilgrim scholar which sets him beyond the attitudes represented by Wordsworth and Keats respectively.<sup>8</sup>

I am not at all sure that there is evidence which can establish that the young Coleridge was convinced that 'ultimate truth was itself a poetic harmony'.<sup>9</sup> It is this view of Coleridge which allows Beer to comment on his relation with Blake in the following manner:

Both poets were one in their conviction that a spiritual reality lay behind the world of everyday: the only difference between them lay in their varying readiness to be influenced by rigorous scientific analysis. ... At this point of sympathy with Blake, Coleridge stands apart from most other English Romantics. In the end, he was not content with a poetry based purely on individual experience: he looked, on the contrary, for an all-embracing vision which should encompass all things in heaven and earth, reconciling the truths of science with those of religion. ... This search led him to a lifelong interest in allegory and symbolisms of all types, ranging from the stiff personifications of moral qualities which could be found in late Renaissance art to mystical theories of 'correspondences' between the physical world and the spiritual.<sup>10</sup>

Many points in Beer's reading of Coleridge need to be discussed in more detail than can be given here, and what follows is only the outline of the sort of change of emphasis which I would wish to make. My main point is simply that Beer tries to see Coleridge's imaginative activity as self-contained at a too early stage, or, in other words, that he tries to suggest that Coleridge thought through the knowledge supplied to him in his reading in mythologies

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8. Ibid. p. 29.

9. This view of Coleridge seems to arise from the picture of Coleridge as a Philosopher presented by J.H.Muirhead (B.Di).

10. J.B.Beer. Coleridge the Visionary. (B.Di). p. 31.



at a time when I suggest that Coleridge was still, predominantly, a detached observer of systems of belief as functions of various ages of man.<sup>11</sup> This divergence from Beer's position involves the discussion of the problem whether Coleridge entertained an 'esoteric' set of beliefs alongside orthodox 'exoteric' convictions.<sup>12</sup> If this view could be established, then there would be grounds for thinking that Coleridge was a 'religious thinker' both in my own sense of the term and in Beer's. However, I can only give one indication here of a difference of specific interpretation in the hope that this will suggest the wider significance of the position that I am wanting to insist upon.

In continuation of the above passage in which Beer compares Coleridge with Blake, he then proceeds to quote from two important letters of Coleridge written at about the same time as Kubla Khan and The Ancient Mariner. The first is the fourth autobiographical letter of Coleridge to Poole,

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11. This suggestion can be supported by reference to Coleridge's projected educational schemes, especially the one described to Thomas Poole in a letter of May, 1796. (See Griggs. 124. p. 209).
  12. It is difficult to know how criteria for such a discussion can be established. I would agree with Beer that Coleridge was forming private or 'esoteric' beliefs at the same time as he was expressing orthodox unitarian arguments, but I am not convinced that the private beliefs which he wished to conceal were as mythologically based as Beer supposes. Instead, it seems more likely that his private beliefs were logical progressions from his public positions which he feared might be taken to be atheistical even though he himself felt that they could be reconciled with Christianity. See, for instance, Coleridge's remarks about Paine, and also his reaction to Lessing. In this last instance, it is uncertain whether Coleridge was aware of Lessing's use of the writings of Reimarus. Certainly, Coleridge read Lessing closely as it seems possible that he found a reference to Hyde in the Fragments (G.E. Lessing. Zur Geschichte und Litteratur. (B.C) p. 223) which caused him to borrow Hyde's De Religio veterum Persarum from the Bristol Library from July 4th to August 31st, 1796, after mentioning Lessing in a letter of April 1st (Griggs. 116. p. 197). For references for Paine and Lessing, see Part II. Chapter 4. (4)n.



October 16th, 1798, in which Coleridge recalls how his father had pointed out the stars to him when he was a child. Coleridge remarks:

I heard him with a profound delight & admiration; but without the least mixture of wonder or incredulity. For from my early reading of Faery Tales, & Genii &c &c - my mind had been habituated to the Vast - & I never regarded my senses in any way as the criteria of my belief. I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions not by my sight - even at that age. Should children be permitted to read Romances, & Relations of Giants & Magicians, & Genii? - I know all that has been said against it; but I have formed my faith in the affirmative. - I know no other way of giving the mind a love of 'the Great', & 'the Whole'.<sup>13</sup>

The second letter which Beer quotes is the letter written at almost exactly the same time as the above, this time to John Thelwall:

- I can at times feel strongly the beauties, you describe, in themselves, & for themselves - but more frequently all things appear little - all the knowledge, that can be acquired, child's play - the universe itself - what but an immense heap of little things? - I can contemplate nothing but parts, & parts are all little - ! - My mind feels as if it ached to behold & know something great - something one & indivisible - and it is only in the faith of this that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns give me the sense of sublimity or majesty! - But in this faith all things counterfeit infinity! -<sup>14</sup>

Beer then comments:

In these two extracts, a delicate relationship between the human mind, the physical universe and the spiritual universe is shadowed, the connecting link between them being the sense of the Vast and Infinite. To see how such conceptions, together with that of the One and the Many, came to take their part in his mature conception

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13. Griggs. 210. p. 354.

14. Griggs. 209. p. 349.

of poetry we may turn directly to a letter written nearly twenty years later, in which he criticized Cottle's Messiah, and set forth his own ideal of epic poetry:<sup>15</sup>

At this point Beer quotes Coleridge's letter of March, 1815, to Joseph Cottle, part of which reads as follows:

Now what the Globe is in Geography, miniaturizing in order to manifest the Truth, such is a Poem to that Image of God, which we were created into, and which still seeks that Unity, or Revelation of the One in and by the Many, which reminds it, that tho' in order to be an individual Being it must go forth from God, yet as the receding from him is to proceed towards Nothingness and Privation, it must still at every step turn back toward him in order to be at all - <sup>16</sup>

Beer comments:

This account of the poetic process gives us an important account of Coleridge's ideal in poetry: and the most revealing aspect of it is the constant analogy which he draws between poetic creation and the Divine Creation of the Universe - an analogy which suggests that his well-known statement concerning the primary Imagination in Biographia Literaria is no idle piece of high-flown rhetoric:<sup>17</sup>

To my mind none of this adds up, as I think that it is Beer's intention that it should, to an impression that, for Coleridge, 'ultimate truth was itself a poetic harmony'. The closeness of the phrasing of the letters to Poole and Thelwall must throw some doubt on the value of the first as 'autobiography' - it seems likely that the picture which Coleridge presents of himself as a 'dreamer' from early childhood both gives a sense of permanence to that aspect of himself which in later 1796 and 1797 Coleridge wished to regard as dominant,<sup>18</sup> and also corroborates his educational theory that a young mind

15. J.B.Beer. Coleridge the Visionary. (B.Di). p. 32.

16. Griggs. Vol. IV. 956. p. 545.

17. J.B.Beer. Coleridge the Visionary. (B.Di). p. 34.

18. See Part II. Chapter 6.

can be habituated to find certain kinds of 'knowledge' acceptable. The element of self-justification comes in Coleridge's use of 'even at that age' and he also immediately turns to the educational question. However, it is not my main intention to undermine the weight which this letter might lend to the belief that Coleridge was, and had always been, a 'dreamer'. My main intention is to argue that Coleridge recommends the reading of fairy tales because such reading encourages the mind to pierce beyond phenomena to the First Cause that lies behind them. It encourages the role of the imagination which Coleridge first described in his Theological Lectures.<sup>19</sup> It is not accidental that Coleridge refers, in the letter to Thelwall, to 'faith' as a prerequisite of a sense of sublimity and vitality in nature. It is because, at this stage, Coleridge retains a faith in something, even though the object of faith has become the 'vast' or the 'great' or the 'one' since nothing can be rationally said of God, that he is able to consider the 'Genii &c &c' as means to an end. Imagination is still subordinate to an end beyond itself. This is no longer true in Dejection where the failure of imagination leaves an abyss. My point is that I do not see that, in 1797, Coleridge was interested in an existent 'spiritual universe', and I consider that the remarks concerning the 'One' in the 1815 letter are misleadingly juxtaposed with those in the letter to Thelwall where they are not yet related to an aesthetic theory. It is true that the 1815 letter helps to clarify Coleridge's ideas as they are expressed in the Biographia Literaria, but it is one of my strongest contentions that it is extremely dangerous to read the

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19. See Part II. Chapter 3.

theory of that work back into the poems of the annus mirabilis.<sup>20</sup>

Towards the end of his book, Beer writes:

Side by side with his visionary world of speculation, there is in his mind a positivist world of rationalist investigation, which he no doubt hoped would eventually be harmonized with it, but which none the less seems at times to contradict it flatly.<sup>21</sup>

My inclination is to stress this positivist aspect of Coleridge's interests. Underlying Beer's interpretation is the assumption, by contrast, that Coleridge was fundamentally a visionary. Hence the title of Beer's book, and hence, also, incidental remarks such as the following:

Thus the rise and decline of the Aeolian imagery marks out accurately an important phase in Coleridge's intellectual development. In tracing it, we are able to see how what had seemed at its height to be an unshakable necessitarianism and materialism in religion and politics could move, as if carried by a noiseless but irresistible current, back to the visionary philosophy in which he was always most at home.<sup>22</sup>

I am unhappy with an interpretation which, stated thus, seems to be a pre-disposition. Nevertheless, I am aware of the force of Beer's argument in a passage such as the following:

Up to the end of 1796, the books which he borrowed from the Bristol Library were not books on 'visionary' themes. They were mainly concerned with that loyalty to contemporary Unitarianism and Liberalism which fully engaged his energies for some time. After this, gradual signs of a change in interests begin to appear. The

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20. This contention does not derive from specific evidence of the 'inaccuracy' of the account in the Biographia Literaria, but simply from a rigid historicity which wants to insist that the Biographia Literaria relates to the Coleridge of the second decade of the nineteenth century.

21. J.B.Beer. Coleridge the Visionary. (B.Di). p. 287.

22. Ibid. p. 98.

quickest way of describing the change is to say that metaphysics becomes dominant, although such a statement requires immediate clarification. 'Metaphysics and Poetry and "facts of mind"' is Coleridge's own phrase to describe his interests, and this puts the metaphysics of the period in its proper context. Certainly the 'mist of Godwinian and Berkeleyan speculations' to which Lowes refers is a serious misnomer. It clouds the fact that Berkeley had ousted Godwin from Coleridge's mind and that the two philosophies could not have existed there together.<sup>23</sup>

There is certainly a problem here and this is not the place to attempt to resolve it. I am not convinced that Beer establishes that when Coleridge stated that he was 'a Berkeleyan' he meant that he had immersed himself in 'Siris' to the extent that Beer supposes.<sup>24</sup> I am inclined to think that Berkeley supplied Coleridge with a new reading of the phrase 'in whom we live and move and have our being' which had been seized upon by Priestley to support a materialist monism and by Berkeley, from Malebranche, to support an immaterialist monism.<sup>25</sup> Berkeley's epistemology, I suggest, supported Coleridge's concentration upon the unity of the human mind and the divine mind - the sort of unity which led Lamb in 1796 to warn Coleridge against blasphemy. This kind of Berkeleyan thinking would have fused with Coleridge's interests in Quakerism and the French Quietism of the end of the Seventeenth Century. Perhaps this emphasis, however, only serves to indicate again that I take Coleridge to have been naturally as analytical in his responses as imaginative. I am conscious that I have done less than

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23. Ibid. p. 106.

24. It is true that Siris was contained in the Berkeley volume that Coleridge borrowed from the Bristol Library, but not 'Siris' alone. (See Part II. Chapter '. (12)n.)

25. For Berkeley's connection with Malebranche, see A.A.Luce (B.Di).

justice to Coleridge's reading of Thomas Taylor<sup>26</sup> and Boehme<sup>27</sup> in particular with the result that my picture of Coleridge may be somewhat one-sided.

However, those 'exoteric' interests of Coleridge displayed particularly in the Political and Theological Lectures of 1795 may be complementary with the 'esoteric' interests described by Beer. I have simply wished to counter-balance his emphasis, and my reading of The Ancient Mariner will indicate that I consider that it was in that poem that Coleridge himself effected a complementation.

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26. For suggestions of Thomas Taylor, see Note-books, particularly 180n.

27. For suggestions of Jacob Boehme, see Note-books, particularly 174n.4.



## CHAPTER III

D. G. James

The work of Professor James is important for this study even though he nowhere dealt in detail with Coleridge's poems.<sup>1</sup> James was interested in the relation between private mythology and religious belief - the issue which, most of all, is raised by my discussion of Dr. Beer's book. In the Prologue to The Romantic Comedy (1948), James isolates three issues raised by the Romantic movement which are of enduring interest. He writes:

These are, first, the need to employ mythology; second, certain beliefs about human knowledge and imagination; and third, a sense of the strange and unknown.<sup>2</sup>

James regards the first of these three as of most interest. He continues:

But in those aspects of English Romanticism I have mentioned, and which are treated in this essay, it is the use of mythology which more than any other gives unity to what I have written. This, I think, is the crucial thing. ... We cannot come to proof and certainty; and therefore we cannot dispense with myth and story. Still, the narrative I have to tell does not end with story merely; or, if it ends with story, it is story with which there goes along, also, authority.<sup>3</sup>

The culmination of the account in The Romantic Comedy at which James hints in the Prologue - the story with authority, had already been anticipated in his Scepticism and Poetry (1937). In that work he is explicit about the

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1. This assertion certainly applies to James's major published work. I have not searched further for any critical consideration of Coleridge's poems in James's work.

2. D.G.James. The Romantic Comedy. (B.Di). p. x.

3. Ibid. p. xi.

dogmatic needs of contemporary England. He writes:

What is of the greatest importance is to try to realize the place of dogma in religion and its necessity for a religion. To many people to-day, we may be sure, religious dogma is an inexplicable mystery which they feel it necessary to condemn wholesale. What makes dogma an impossible stumbling-block to many such is of course its assertion of the miraculous; but what alone can dispel, to any degree, its impossibility in this respect is the realization of the inevitability of miracle for religion, and the understanding that a great religion demands, as a condition of its vitality, a structure of belief in what is shot through with the miraculous. Unless we can realize that this is so, we shall either stand outside Christianity and condemn it, as Keats did, or we shall, if our attitude be religious, be one of the many modernist apologists for Christianity who, we may believe, do harm to their religion by seeking carefully to extract from it all element of miracle. Such teachers may, indeed they often do, reduce dogma to the status of a symbol, beautiful and expressive perhaps, but yet only a symbol; and they thereby weaken its vitality and value. The historical basis which Christianity claims is fundamental to its existence, and to deny it is to rob Christianity of its potency in the world.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear from this passage that James believes in the autonomy of religious dogma. The incarnation of Christ at a historical moment provides the explanation of experience in religious dogma with an authority that cannot be shared by other discourses which are the creations of different faculties of the human mind and hence differently divorced from reality. It is James's Kantian epistemological position which allows him to emphasize the discreteness of several discourses subordinate to reality, and which allows him to assume that science and poetry are different forms of limited cognition. Imagination is the 'prime agent', to use James's borrowing from

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4. D.G.James. Scepticism and Poetry. (B.Di). pp. 245-246.

Coleridge,<sup>5</sup> of all human knowledge of the world, and science and poetry are two discourses which have their own strict rules.<sup>6</sup> For James, the scientific imagination is necessarily mechanistic and he attacks Whitehead for attempting to change its nature. For James, science which attempts to use a non-mechanistic analogy either ceases or fails to be science:

There is no point at which the mechanistic imagination of science can stop; for to make it do so is to abandon the hope of arriving at rules of universal application. And it is therefore mistaken to resent the incursion of the scientific imagination into biology and psychology. The scientific study of human behaviour is necessarily the study of the nervous system, imagined as a mechanism, and all observations about human behaviour which are not propositions about the body and the nervous system are not, whatever else they may be and whatever value we may ascribe to them, scientific. So far from its being the case that, as Whitehead suggests, the mechanical and materialistic imagination should be sacrificed even in the investigation of the physical world, it is rather the case that it is necessary and inevitable even in the investigation of the most complex organisms. Entities

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5. 'The Prime Agent' is the title of the first chapter of James's Scepticism and Poetry.

6. Much of James's position is held in opposition to I.A. Richards. The following passage, for instance, is directed against Richards: "We must, on the contrary, view poetic experience as an awareness of an imaginative object; and the central "experience" is not effects wrought in us, but beholdment by the imagination of an object. It is what is present to our minds which is vital in the experience, and not the emotional-volitional effects". (Scepticism and Poetry. p. 58).

James and Richards both agree that 'poetry' and 'science' are discrete activities, but for different reasons. For James, the 'content' of the disciplines is the basis of differentiation, whereas, for Richards, it is the divergent intentions and expectations embodied in the manner of presentation. (See I.A. Richards. Practical Criticism. (B.Di). Part III. Chapter I. Four Kinds of Meaning. pp. 179-188). Hence, I suspect that Richards could not make the same kind of objection to Whitehead's scientific philosophy that James felt was possible and necessary. (See below).

such as life and mind, because in them 'sensations' do not inhere, must be extruded, so far as is possible from the scientist's imagination of the world.<sup>7</sup>

It is in precisely these terms that James sees Coleridge's rejection of Hartleian associationism. James writes:

Now Coleridge once and for all threw over all that Hartley stood for, and ceased to hold an associationism, whether as a "way of surveying the mind" or in any other way; it is true that in so doing he adopted an idealism. But this, for our purpose, can be separated out from his view of the mind as an 'active agency'. And the choice is not between, as is suggested, the materialist and the idealist. The choice is between a materialist psychology which does not see its materialism merely as a necessity of scientific inquiry, and a psychology which sees materialism as a necessity to scientific method, and, by rejecting it, is content to be open to the charge of being 'unscientific'.<sup>8</sup>

In the period leading up to 1801 Coleridge gradually accepted, or so James assumes, the distinction between a scientific and a poetic imagination. The purpose of Scepticism and Poetry is to place these two subordinate cognitions in the context of dogmatic religious truth, whilst the purpose of The Romantic Comedy is to show that both logically and historically an authoritative dogma is a necessary progression from scientific and poetic imagination. To put the ~~paradox~~ bluntly, James tries to justify dogmatic belief existentially. In the two works that I have mentioned, James uses Coleridge as the main instrument in his didactic purpose. James uses Coleridge to demonstrate a transition from an allegiance to scientific imagination to an allegiance to poetic imagination, which is the main concern of the first book, and also to demonstrate a transition from an allegiance

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7. D.G.James. Scepticism and Poetry. (B.Di). p. 41. For Whitehead; see (B.Di).

8. D.G.James. Scepticism and Poetry. (B.Di). pp. 60-61.

to poetic imagination to an acceptance of Christian dogma, which is the concern of the second book. In the first, Scepticism and Poetry, James is anxious to assert that belief expressed in a poem<sup>9</sup> is in a different category from belief that is related to dogma. He writes:

Now the matter of the explicit expression of belief in poetry is by no means so important as Mr. Richards would have us believe. For the poet's belief can ultimately be interpreted to be only the presence to his imagination of a world which is the world in which he lives, and which, as he responds to it in his life, is his real world. The poet's belief in other words is not a matter of mere explicit assertion; it consists in his emotional-volitional response to the world of his imagination, which is shown by that response to be his real world. Whether or not the poet makes formal assertion of belief is not important. Mr. Richards, in accordance with his view of the place of belief in poetry, is strongly opposed to what he calls 'revelation' theories - views which hold that poetry can claim to give us truth. For our part, we should agree that the 'revelation' theory is a useless and impossible doctrine; but for reasons other than those which Mr. Richards holds. For against the 'revelation' theory it is necessary to maintain that, as we do not know 'for truth' (as Keats says), the ultimate nature of the universe, we must be content with a situation in which the poet is seen as conveying to us the world as it is for his imagination, which controls his life, and which is thus real to him. Ultimately, whether or not the world is really as it exists for his imagination neither he nor we can in all strictness be said to know.<sup>10</sup>

I shall have to refer to this passage again in discussing Professor Whalley's approach to literature for Whalley tries to build a 'revelation' theory on the shaky foundation (for James) of the poetic imagination, but the important

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9. To which, of course, I.A.Richards took exception.

10. D.G.James. Scepticism and Poetry. (B.Di). pp. 66-67.



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point here is that a corollary of James's position is that acceptance of dogmatic truth in a poet must be at odds with poetic activity. James shows that this was the case with Wordsworth, whereas Keats and Shakespeare retained their poetic powers by not committing themselves to a received dogmatic truth. In advocating the acceptance of dogmatic truth, James is proposing a gesture which is not unlike a Kierkegaardian leap from the 'aesthetic' to the 'ethical'.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, James divides Coleridge's life into three phases - until 1801, 1801-1817, 1817-1834, in which he regards the main interests to have been scientific, aesthetic, and religious respectively. James is never interested in the first of the three periods. He writes in The Romantic Comedy:

The first period, that up to 1801, is the least important for our purposes.<sup>12</sup>

and, later in the same book, the structure which suits his convenience forces him to make the following amazing comment:

... for up to about the year 1817 Coleridge's thought turned on the imagination and afterwards principally on the reason, the life of which is consummated in faith. Up to this year he did not write as a Christian; afterwards he did, and during this later period we hear very little of the imagination but a great deal of the practical reason and of faith.<sup>13</sup>

Presumably Unitarianism did not count as Christianity for James, and here we have a suggestion of the basis of my dissatisfaction with his work on Coleridge. If James did deliberately discount Unitarianism in the above comment it would have been because Unitarianism was itself a rational mythology which stood in opposition to orthodox dogmatic Christianity.

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11. See S. Kierkegaard. (int. W. Lowrie) Fear and Trembling. New York. 1954.

12. D.G.James. The Romantic Comedy. (B.Di). p. 162.

13. Ibid. p. 197.

Coleridge became dissatisfied with Unitarianism for the same sorts of reasons as we have seen that he became hostile to Godwinism in 1795 and 1796 - notably because both doctrines were substitute religions which were founded on personal inclinations rather than on absolute truths. My point is that the conflict between personal mythology and dogma was a conflict of the 1790's as well as of the period which James describes, but that the conflict at the earlier period was different in that the idea of dogma involved was a pre-Kantian one.

After discussing the ideas of the late Coleridge alongside the views of Newman, James summarises the way in which Coleridge is forced beyond the personal mythologising characteristic of the 'aesthetic' period to an acceptance of an authoritative myth that is given, not made. James expounds in the following manner:

The reason, therefore, or the imagination, as we can now indifferently call it, rises to its final task in the incorporation of the super-sensible in the images of sense, in the creation of dogma. We may call the creation of dogma a process of myth-making in which there is working a process of high dialectical subtlety; but this was not (at least, finally) the view of Coleridge. The only mythology in which we can find rest is the mythology which is also history, and which therefore is given to the imagination. Concerned with truth and reality beyond sense, the reason of man must operate imaginatively. The reason tries to use the concepts of the understanding, despite their feebleness and contradictoriness, to say in what the transcendent consists; also it must use the images of the imagination in its endeavour, also vacillating and inadequate, to show the eternal. But here, in the face of human failure, God's act intervenes. For the Bible is not a human book; the New Testament is the record of God's act in history; Christ's life and the divine Sacrifice of the Cross hold the imagination as nothing less than God's act could do. ... In this, in acceptance

of the mythology which is divinely given as history, the long and difficult history of Romanticism in England comes to its end. After the labour of mighty imaginations in the creation of myth and allegory, we return to the mythology enacted in time through the free act of God.<sup>14</sup>

I have tried to show that the idea that God had revealed himself in history was a theological assumption for Coleridge in his early years. In the Theological Lectures of 1795 Coleridge does not question this belief, and I have also attempted to indicate how the breakdown of a sense of history led to the compression of historical events into mental possibilities in the present.

My point, therefore, is that initially the function of the imagination for Coleridge was to recreate mentally those conditions which had previously revealed God in objective events. This was the way in which Coleridge attempted to make an 'objective' God subjectively meaningful. As I have already claimed, Coleridge's imagination in the mid-1790's was a means to a theological end, and that end had dogmatic priority. The dogmatism which Coleridge made existential in the 1790's was therefore different in kind from the dogmatism which James argues that that existentialism made necessary. It was also different from the dogmatism which James found amongst some of his contemporaries.<sup>15</sup> James is unhappy with contemporary dogmatism because, in fact, it is more nearly what it says. James seems unhappy because modern dogmatism is a received belief and not one that has been achieved through the

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14. Ibid. p. 209.

15. See James's strictures on modern dogmatism at the end of The Romantic Comedy. pp. 274-275.

exercise and final renunciation of human imagination.<sup>16</sup> Achieved dogmatism, is different in kind from received dogmatism, and no one asks the question whether a second generation new dogmatism - a 'classicist' dogmatism, perhaps, - is the same as a pre-Romantic theistic dogmatism. This kind of 'objective' God was the object of the belief of the rational deists of the early eighteenth century.<sup>17</sup> In the 1790's Coleridge was moving towards a critical attitude to everything theological except the being of God. Coleridge retained, at this period a reverential attitude to an absolute God which is different from the post-critical attitude which James describes

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16. James, therefore, found himself very much in the predicament of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, a critic of whom, C. Van Til (B.Di), wrote in 1946:

"All the doctrines of the Theology of Crisis, then must be seen through the spectacles of the Critique of Pure Reason. Nothing could be more untrue to history than to say that the theology of Barth and Brunner is basically similar to that of Luther and Calvin. Dialecticism is a basic reconstruction of the whole of Reformation theology along critical lines.... A reformation theology reconstructed along the lines of modern critical principles is not a Reformation theology in any form". (p. 366)

For Barth, see H. Hartwell. (B.Di).

17. If, that is, such a belief in an 'objective' God is or was attained or attainable. I am aware of subscribing, somewhat incidentally and strictly for the sake of argument, to what may be as much a myth of 'objectivity' as of an existent man of undissociated sensibility. Philosophically, I would prefer to subscribe to the view that Kant was right absolutely rather than to the view that his argument is a function of what is wrong with post-Renaissance man. If James is Kantian, I would wish to be more, not less, so.

from his own post-critical position. James argues that Coleridge's sense of dogma developed from his view of imagination, but I wish to claim that The Ancient Mariner, for instance, was an attempt to describe the achievement of theological knowledge, and that it was only later that Coleridge could himself consider it as a work of 'pure **imagination**'. It was only later that Coleridge could see knowledge of God in the context of post-Kantian thinking about the imagination, whereas at the time of the main poems it was the quest for knowledge of God which suggested to him a function for the imagination which was to prepare him for the reception of Kant's thinking. James presents a valuable picture of the relation between religious thinking and personal mythopoietic activity - one which I find more convincing than Dr. Beer's. For this reason I find James's comparison between Blake and Coleridge more accurate than Beer's.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, James seems to be right for all the wrong reasons. His account of the early Coleridge, such as it is, is inaccurate or without interest. The religious dogmatism which he describes is not the same dogmatism which affected Coleridge at the time of writing The Ancient Mariner.

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18. See D.G. James. The Romantic Comedy. (B.Di). Part One. The Gospel of Hell.

## CHAPTER IV

G. Whalley

In the Introduction to his Poetic Process (1953) Professor Whalley makes it clear that his attitude towards the status of poetry developed out of his particular study of Coleridge. He writes:

Not until my work was well advanced did I come upon the fulfilment, in the work of Kierkegaard, Jaspers and Marcel, of much that Coleridge had striven for and of much that, in a tenuous and indistinct form, I had been led by my subject to adopt.<sup>1</sup>

Two points of Whalley's account of poetic process are of most significance. Outlining the position which he is to develop, Whalley writes:

From a direct inquiry into artistic experience certain facts emerged with compelling force to dominate the whole investigation. ... e) A work of art is not first conceived and then made; it is discovered and realizes itself in the making. f) Art bodies forth reality.<sup>2</sup>

The second of these two points is fundamental to Whalley's belief in the importance of art. Whalley finally summarises his belief in the following way:

In short, this is a plea that we should notice how from time to time, in those persons for whom we reserve the name of genius, the mind asserts itself by breaking through the opaque screens of cultivated custom, social formality, and intolerant professionalism, to achieve and embody acts of vision; and how those acts of vision, by bringing us suddenly and humbly back to earth, restore for us the memories of incandescent moments-in-time which are our only glimpses of eternity.<sup>3</sup>

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1. G. Whalley. Poetic Process. (B.Di). p. xiv.
  2. Ibid. pp. xvii-xviii.
  3. Ibid. p. xxvi.



It is not difficult to discern the materials from which Whalley constructs his view of art. In a chapter entitled 'Two Views of Imagination', Whalley writes:

Coleridge maintained that imagination was not the unique property of the artist, but that it underlay all knowledge even of the most prosaic kind. He sought to establish the claim that poetry be considered as a serious mode of revelation; he wished to show that poetry and 'life' were not divorced, that poetry is a window opening upon reality. The poet's activity, exceptional though it might be, was in his view an extension of ordinary cognitive experience; poetry and any other form of knowledge were to be judged by the same criteria.<sup>4</sup>

It is easy to see that this is a reading of Coleridge through the work of D.G.James which at the same time distorts James and Coleridge. Whalley's footnote to the above paragraph is inadequate here:

This summary view of Coleridge's position is set forth at length by D.G.James in Scepticism and Poetry (1937). The account that follows diverges, however, in several respects from Professor James's discussion.<sup>5</sup>

As the passage I have quoted shows, Whalley clearly diverges radically from James's interpretation of Coleridge.<sup>6</sup> Whalley imposes a 'revelation' theory of poetry on James's Kantian view, and posits a Coleridgean position which was a mixture of attitudes. Whalley does not support his assertions by reference to Coleridge's work with the result that one has the impression that analysis of Coleridge's thinking is secondary to the analysis of conflicting interpretations of it. Whalley accepts James's position in opposition to

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4. Ibid. p. 50.

5. Ibid. p. 50n.

6. See Part III. Chapter 3. (10).

Richards, but he does not accept James's contention that poetry has only limited cognitive force. On the contrary, for Whalley, it is only through poetry that reality can be known. In James's terms, Whalley accepts that 'scientific imagination' is a distinct category of cognitive activity, but Whalley insists that 'poetic imagination' is superior and is not inferior to any dogmatism.

Alongside a belief in the status of the 'poetic' as reality-revealing, Whalley develops his view of the 'process' by which the revelation is achieved. He writes:

The process which ends in a work of art is at once an act of discovery and self-discovery; it is an act of self-realization which at the same time makes the world more real.<sup>7</sup>

The reality which Whalley considers to be revealed does not exist before the revelation but is manifested in it. Whalley eschews the dualism between 'experience' and 'words' which, for Harding, was in truth a dualism between 'life' and 'art'. However, unlike Beer, Whalley is not prepared to rest content with imaginative activity. For Whalley, imaginative activity does not simply extend possible meanings of 'real' but instead partly is 'real' as a process of creativity and partly increases the 'reality' of an objective world. In his attempt to fuse the idea that art 'bodies forth' reality with the sense that there is no dichotomy between art and reality at all, Whalley tries to reconcile a view of art as cognitive of external realities with a view which sees it as 'expression' which contributes to a process of psychological individuation. Whalley elaborates his attempted reconciliation in the following way:

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7. G. Whalley. Poetic Process. (B.Di). p. 11.

The difference between involvement in reality and non-involvement must now be described. To be involved at the interface is to experience, to engage in, (in some sense) to construct, an event of reality: and this event I call paradeigmatic. This term has two implications: a) the form or archetype of human experience is to be found in paradeigmatic experience and not in the experience of everyday man in a workaday world; and b) that this order of experience is its own argument, carries its own proof within itself, is at once an event of value and of knowing.<sup>8</sup>

At first sight it might seem to be open to every individual to gain contact with this paradeigmatic experience through personal dream or fantasy, but no sooner does Whalley approach this psychological emphasis as dominant than he moves away towards a sense of objectivity that is particularly revealed to the artist or the mystic. He writes:

The desire for what is predictable in experience can become so powerful as to lift a person out of the flux of unique experience into a static lifeless world of abstractions in which there is no reality and in which he ceases to be real. And such a state of affairs - as we see in our own time - can be misrepresented as reality, not only by individuals, but by families, societies, even whole nations. It is of no such world that the poets and mystics bring us news.<sup>9</sup>

Significantly, Whalley adds this footnote to the last sentence:

Cf. C.G.Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul: 'Any reaction to stimulus may be causally explained; but the creative act, which is the absolute antithesis of mere reaction, will for ever elude the human understanding'.<sup>10</sup>

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8. Ibid. p. 31. Whalley's use of 'paradeigmatic' is explicitly related to the use of the same term in the work of Karl Mannheim. Diagnosis of our Time. (B.Di). Towards a New Social Philosophy. Section 6. Valuation and Paradigmatic Experience. pp. 134-135.

9. G.Whalley. Poetic Process. (B.Di). p. 43.

10. Ibid. p. 43n.

The sentence from Jung does not seem especially pertinent to the point that Whalley is making, but it indicates that Jungian thinking lurks beneath the surface of Whalley's thoughts. The confusion in Whalley's position arises, perhaps, from the fact that his language elides the ideas of physical and psychic 'reality' with the result that there is also confusion between 'revelation' and 'expression'. The important point is that Whalley's confusion enables him to seem to be discussing 'experience into words' with relation to Coleridge and The Ancient Mariner as if an existent experiential reality is carried into artistic expression, whilst in fact he is discussing words in relation to psychic reality which is not fixed at a point in time prior to the expression of the words for the first time in the poem. Speaking abstractly of 'symbol and myth', Whalley's attitude in this respect becomes apparent in the following passage:

The personal myth preserves its integrity in an infinity of variations and resonant combinations; the incandescent centre of emphasis falls now on this symbol, now on that; and with each fresh arrangement, each gracious combination of personal symbols, the flow of evoked images, words, sounds is modified to serve the compelling integrity of the myth. ... The primitive and civilised, the communal and the private, the primordial and the personal, the accidental and the permanent, join in a ritual dance gesturing forth the present epiphany, while the poet relives and revives a past in the present from which already a future is taking shape.<sup>11</sup>

Whereas G. Wilson Knight<sup>12</sup> and Maud Bodkin<sup>13</sup> - the 'mythographers' as

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11. G. Whalley. Poetic Process. (B.Di). p. 189.

12. For G.W.Knight's theoretical position, see (B.Dii) and for his remarks on The Ancient Mariner see (B.Di).

13. See M.Bodkin. (B.Di).

C.S.Lewis called them<sup>14</sup> - were interested in archetypes as links between poetic expression and poetic appreciation by the reader, Whalley does control his interest historically in as much as he is predominantly concerned with the experiential relationship of the poet with his own words both before and after their poetic expression, nevertheless I want to argue that he is not sufficiently historical in that his attitude towards poetry causes him not to want to differentiate too carefully between the experience which preceded and which followed the writing of the poem. I wish to insist once more, as I have already done in reply to Professor James, that the experience which went into The Ancient Mariner was different in kind from the experience which was then partly given meaning by it, and I wish to insist that the difference does not simply reside in the intervening existence of the poem.

Whalley's article "The Mariner and the Albatross" anticipates the approach to poetry which he elaborated in Poetic Process. My main objection to his reading of The Ancient Mariner is, as I have suggested, that he fails to distinguish carefully between the experience which went into the poem and the experience by which Coleridge came to interpret it. Whalley's confused intention is apparent at the outset:

I wish to examine the poem a) to show how and to what extent Coleridge's inner life is revealed in the Rime; and b) to show that the albatross was for Coleridge, whether consciously or unconsciously, a symbol with profound personal significance.<sup>15</sup>

In this passage Whalley does not make it clear whether he regards his first examination to be concerned with Coleridge's experience before the existence of the poem and his second examination with it afterwards, or whether he is prepared to accept that the two kinds of examination are essentially the same,

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14. See C.S.Lewis and E.M.W.Tillyard. (B.Di). p. 120.

15. G.Whalley. "The Mariner and the Albatross". (B.Dii). p. 382.



that, as Jung would claim, emanations from the subconscious progressively reveal the whole personality and provide the individual with symbols by which he can understand the inner self of which he was previously unaware.<sup>16</sup>

Whereas I have suggested that Professor Harding rejected simple intentionalism in favour of an idea of subconscious intention, Whalley clings to the language of intentionalism even though he in fact sees the poem as part of a flux of experience. Whalley's uneasiness emerges in the following introductory comment:

The aesthetic and poetic qualities of The Ancient Mariner are impressive. Other writers have examined in the poem the elements of colour and drama, the moral, the truth and accuracy of the detail, the supple and sensitive versification. But the haunting quality of the poem does not, and cannot, grow from any of these elements, whether taken singly or in any combination. Coleridge's creative imagination has fused all these elements into a completely unified organism to express his fundamental meaning; a meaning of whose full significance he was probably unconscious at the time of composition.<sup>17</sup>

Although I accept that Coleridge may not have been fully conscious of the full implications of the language which he used in his poem, I do not accept that it necessarily follows that the unconscious meaning of 1797 is the meaning which becomes conscious in 1815 or 1830 or at any time in Coleridge's life thereafter. To accept this supposition would be to see the development of the personality solipsistically as the development of inner life and hence deny the possibility that external affairs might render it unnecessary for the individual that past unconscious meaning should ever become conscious. Whalley seems to assume too easily that Coleridge's later conscious

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16. See C.G.Jung (B.Dii) and also H.Schaer (B.Di).

17. G.Whalley. "The Mariner and the Albatross". (B.Dii). p. 382.



experience is a key to his earlier unconsciousness, and by a process of deduction from Coleridge's late to his early experience Whalley is then able to claim prophetic force for The Ancient Mariner. He writes:

Whether or not he recognized this process at the time, Coleridge enshrined in The Ancient Mariner the quintessence of himself, of his suffering and dread, his sense of sin, his remorse, his powerlessness. And

Never sadder tale was heard  
By man of woman born.

For it is not only a crystallization of his personal experience up to the time of the composition of the first version, but also an appalling prophecy fulfilled to a great extent in his life and successively endorsed by his own hand as time passed.<sup>18</sup>

Whalley's position would be more convincing if he could show how Coleridge's attitude to The Ancient Mariner developed after its writing alongside other intellectual and emotional developments, but I should still wish to insist that Coleridge's application of the poem to his own condition at the time, for instance, of his journey to Malta,<sup>19</sup> is revealing about Coleridge in 1805 but not at all about Coleridge in 1797 or about the meaning of the poem for Coleridge at the time that he completed it. The problem of the relation between Coleridge's experience and the poem in 1797 still remains, but I think that it is not at all aided by consideration of Coleridge's relation to it at later dates.

Like Whalley, I am concerned with the process involved in the creation of literature, but, unlike Whalley, I see the process solely as the achievement of synthesis and do not wish to assert that the achievement reveals reality. Like Dr. Beer, I see that the possible function of a work

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18. Ibid. p. 383.

19. See D.Sultana. (B.Di). p. 129.

of literature is to extend the sense of the 'real', but, unlike Dr. Beer, I see this extension as the result of comprehensive imitation rather more than of imaginative creation.

## CONCLUSION

## CONCLUSION

In my Preface I argued that we now stand in relation to works of literature - aesthetic products, in the same way as Coleridge stood in relation to Priestley's rational systematisation of Christian theology. Coleridge attempted to systematise his relationship as well as be sceptical of his systematisation. Both responses were projected in The Ancient Mariner, in relation to which we now find ourselves. I argued that to follow Coleridge would involve both a willingness to provide a systematic explanation of his artefact and, equally, a willingness to be sceptical of that explanation. Both responses are projected in this thesis. In the first three Parts I have tried to describe the complex forces surrounding the writing of The Ancient Mariner, and, in Part IV, I have indicated, in four cases, the way in which there is an inevitable inter-play between the critical stance adopted towards a work of literature and the origin of the stance in the work itself. By indicating how this is true in these four cases, I have tried to suggest that the attitude that I have adopted towards the study of Coleridge also derives in large measure and often unconsciously from that study. That this circularity must perplex the critic of Coleridge in particular is, I think, an indication of the amazing extent to which present thinking has been influenced by Coleridge's wide-ranging intellect.

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- A: Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.
- B: Works of Joseph Priestley.
- C: Works published in the 17th and 18th centuries.
- D: Secondary material:
  - i) Books.
  - ii) Articles, essays, and pamphlets.

in Dii, the following abbreviations have been used:

- PMLA for Proceedings of the Modern Languages Association of America.
- JHI for the Journal of the History of Ideas.
- JEGP for the Journal of English and Germanic Philology.

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